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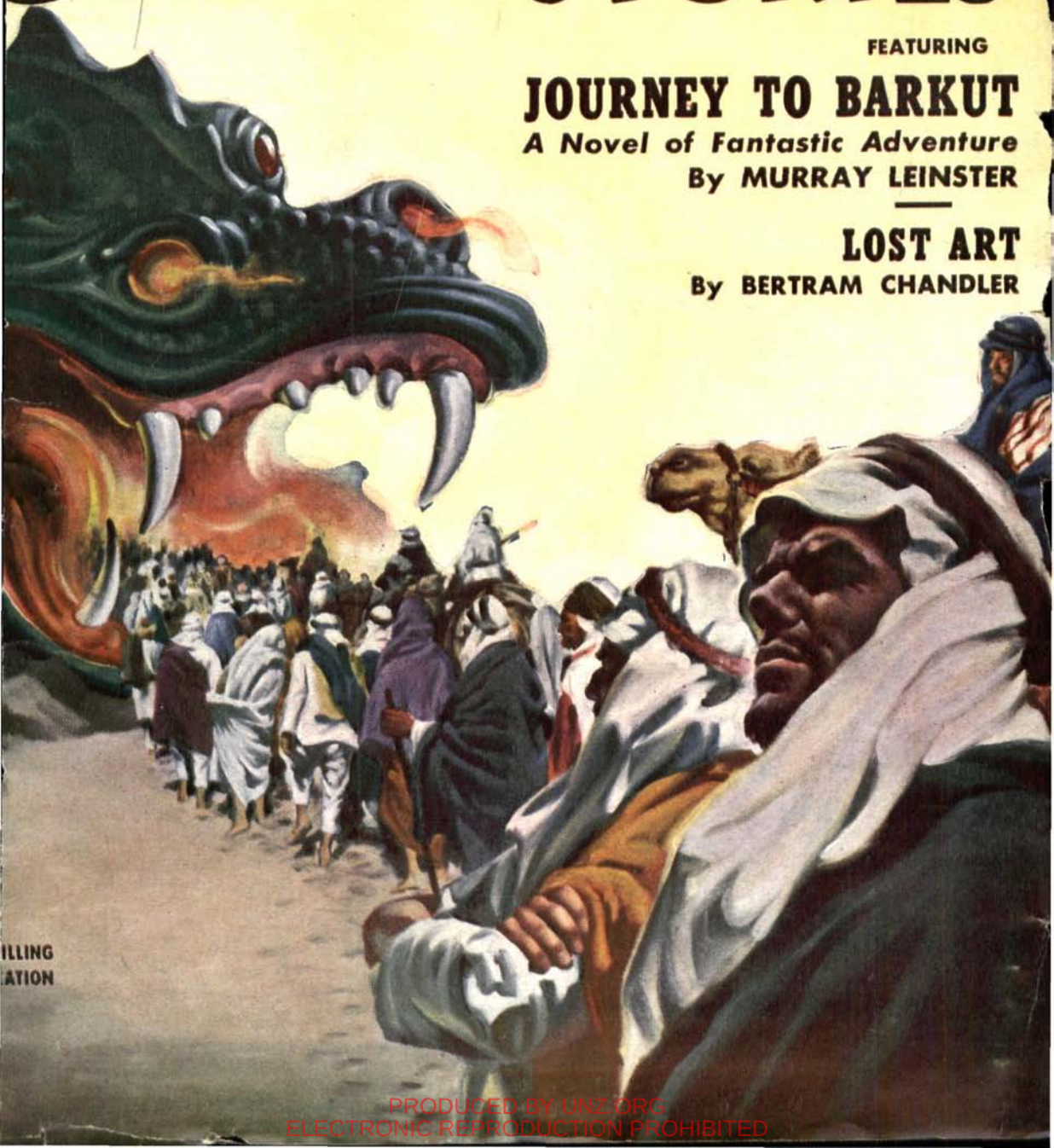

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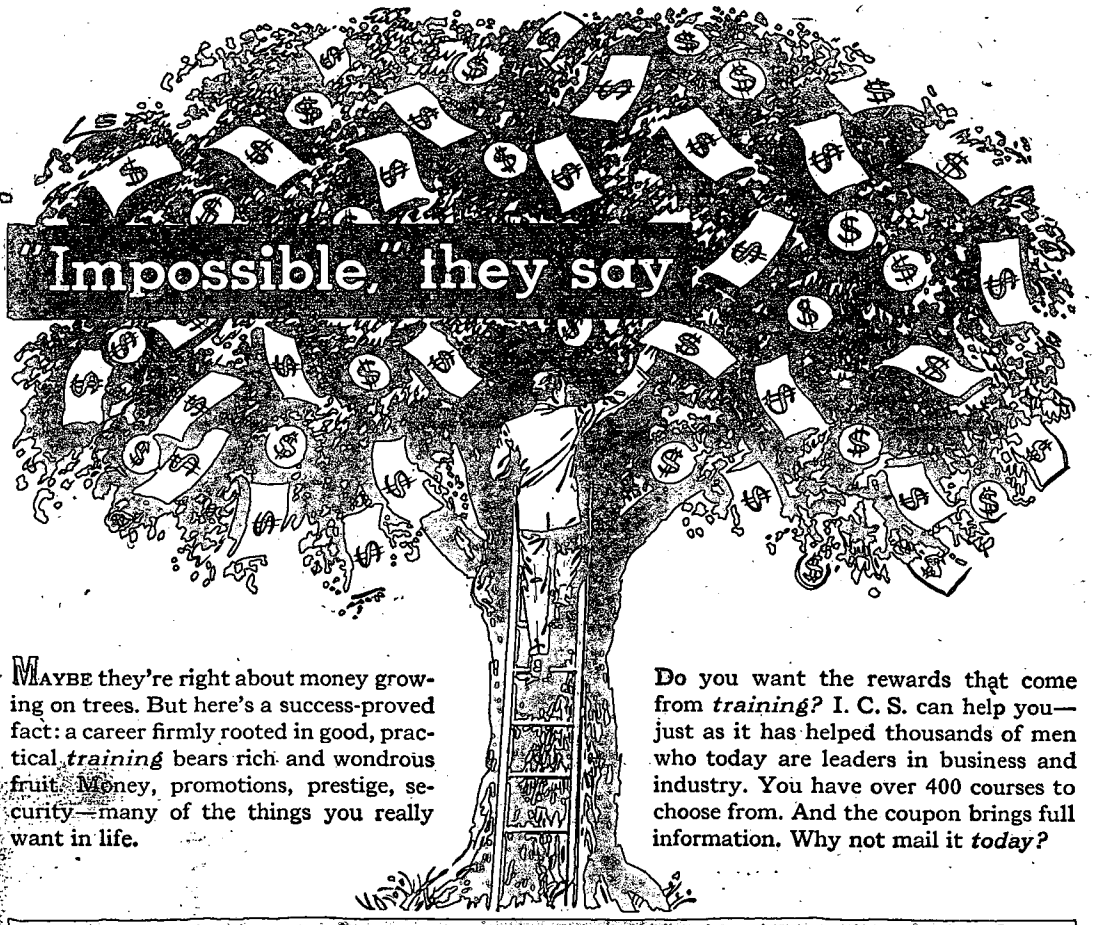

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Vol. 24, No. 3 A THRILLING PUBLICATION January, 1952

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JOURNEY TO BARKUT ..... Murray Leinster 10
A hock-shop relic leads Tony Gregg to the odd land of djinns and sins, dragons and dreams, walking castles and talking sand

A Novelet

LOST ART ..... A. Bertram Chandler 94
Want a Rigellian flower garden, a Moonflower, or a Chlorian prayer mat? These space sleuths will find it—at a price!

Short Stories

THE GREAT IDEA ..... Raymond Z. Gallun 80
Lou Hamlin was the ideal sucker with that Earth-Moon scheme!

THE WHEEL ..... John Wyndham 115
After the atom bomb—what will humanity have to face next?

HOW GREEN WAS MY MARTIAN ..... Mack Reynolds 121
All that Jeri wanted to do was open a kafiz stand on Terra

Features

THE ETHER VIBRATES ..... The Editor 6
A science fiction department featuring letters from readers

CURRENT FAN PUBLICATIONS ..... Jerome Bixby 140
A department of comment and criticism devoted to fandom

THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL ..... Movie Review 145
A new science fiction movie based on a story by Harry Bates

SAMUEL MINES, *Editor*

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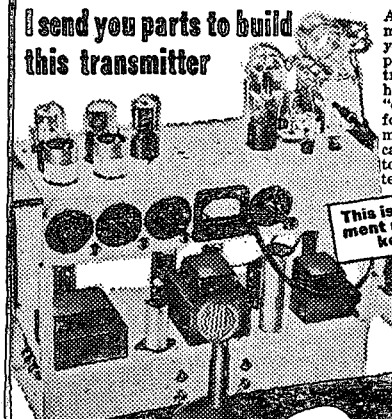

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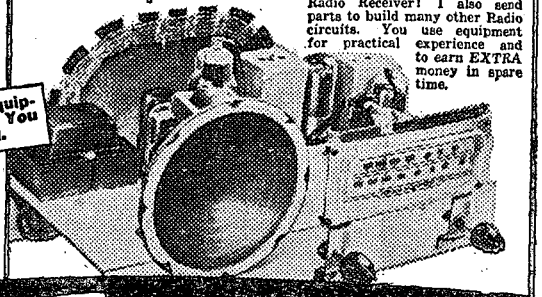

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WITH this issue, STARTLING STORIES goes on a monthly basis. This is something your letters have asked for over and over again. Now that it is a reality, we hope you are as pleased as we are.

This expansion of the field is thoroughly in line with the steady growth of interest in science fiction. We happen to be tickled because we have a large number of phenomenally loyal readers who are perpetually hungry for more stf stories. Doubling STARTLING'S appearances gives them more; it also represents a considerable opportunity for a lot of authors, struggling and otherwise. And the thing which makes us happiest is that this growth appears to be steady and solid, not a flash boom.

That conservative journal of the book trade, *Publishers' Weekly,* compiles a report from the trade which indicates that the demand for stf books has grown slowly but steadily over a period of three years. Half a dozen small publishing houses have kept up a stream of new stf titles, all of which have sold well enough to keep them in business. Meanwhile, the larger publishing houses, spotting a trend, have leaped in. And a spokesman for Simon & Schuster has expressed his firm's interest in the field as a "relatively stable market."

Once a Fan

This means the giants of publishing do not think they are going to lose their science fiction public very quickly. Apparently once a fan, always—or almost always—a fan. Sales of hard cover stf books have run from five to seven thousand copies, with the top writers reaching ten thousand in the case of the most successful novels. Incidentally, anthologies sell better than most novels, better than all but the very best novels. And we need hardly tell you where the anthologists get their stories.

Of course, none of these hard cover jobs begins to approach the circulation of a stf magazine. But since a book buyer has to shell out $2.50 and up for a book instead of two bits for a magazine, the fact that he is willing to part with a much larger hunk of cash might be some indication of his seriousness in the matter of following up a hobby.

As we have found mostly true in the magazine field, science fiction sells better than fantasy, although there is a definite field for fantasy as well. And although few stf books zoom to a best-selling spot, they continue to sell and sell and sell, so that publishers are careful not to let them get out of print.

The book field is somewhat different from the magazine field as to type of story—except in the case of anthologies. However, if you've read many hard-cover stf novels, you likely found the stories to be of the elementary type first used and now outgrown in the magazines of fifteen years ago. A case in point is *The Big Eye,* one of the few which did hit the best-seller lists a glancing blow, which is of the familiar "earth doomed by an approaching star" type. The science-fiction here is slight and is used more as a medium for unleashing the author's satire upon Earth and its humans than for its own sake. In the modern magazine story, on the other hand, science is enjoyed as fiction on its own merits.

Perennial Favorites

Yet it is surprising how often one of the old stories retains its popularity. *Sinister Barrier* is still going great guns, Van Vogt's *Slan* has apparently never lost its popularity, and readers are continually asking for E. E. Smith's *Skylark* stories and many of the old Dr. Keller novels. It is possible that these older and simpler tales are attracting new readers to science fiction, readers who might find *The World Of A* too much for them. As an introduction to stf, a lot of the old stories serve perfectly, even as they served some of us older hands years ago.

On the other side of the fence, many of the new and more sophisticated crop of

(Continued on page 8)

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You Can Influence Others With Your Thinking!

TRY IT SOME TIME. Concentrate intently upon another person seated in a room with you, without his noticing it. Observe him gradually become restless and finally turn and look in your direction. Simple—yet it is a *positive demonstration* that thought generates a mental energy which can be projected from your mind to the consciousness of another. Do you realize how much of *your success* and happiness in life depend upon your influencing others? Is it not important to you to have others understand your point of view—to be receptive to your proposals?

Demonstrable Facts

How many times have you wished there were some way you could impress another favorably—*get across to him or her your ideas*? That thoughts can be transmitted, received, and understood by others is now scientifically demonstrable. The tales of miraculous accomplishments of mind by the ancients are now known to be fact—not fable. The method whereby these things can be *intentionally*, not accidentally, accomplished has been a secret long cherished by the Rosicrucians—one of the schools of ancient wisdom existing throughout the world. To thousands everywhere, for centuries, the Rosicrucians have privately taught this nearly-lost art of the practical use of mind power.

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THE ETHER VIBRATES

(Continued from page 6)

stories are also on their way to book publication. *Wine Of The Dreamers* by John D. MacDonald, which you will remember from our pages, will soon see hard covers, as will *House Of Many Worlds;* by Sam Merwin, Jr., to name just two.

In the field of anthologies, Groff Conklin's books have been in a class by themselves. His first, *The Best Of Science Fiction,* has been on sale about five years and has sold something like 33,800 copies; his second, *A Treasury Of Science Fiction,* about 26,000 copies, and so on. Apparently they will continue to sell for some time to come.

Science Fiction for Children

An interesting development in the field is a list of stf titles for young people. Fletcher Pratt has collaborated with Jack Coggins on a sort of junior edition of Willie Ley's opus on rockets and space travel, Heinlein has one coming out called *Between Planets,* and there is the usual saga of the space patrol, this time by Malcolm Jameson.

The extension of stf into a child's world is not surprising. In fact, children took over science fiction about the same time as Gernsback. It made a perfect medium for comic strips, adventure movies and juvenile books of wildest fantasy. This was stf with no holds barred. However, a serious note is creeping in as the prospects of space travel grow more real. Instead of Buck Rogers' adventures the new books try to give children some idea of the universe we live in and of the problems now being met and conquered, problems which stand between us and travel to the nearest planets.

All of which continues to please us. The magazines are still the largest source of stories, the best market for authors, the training and proving ground of the new trends. Though we applaud the publication of stf books, we cannot help a certain smug conviction that we are years ahead of the book field. And that, therefore, every reader of a book like *The Big Eye* will find his appetite whetted for more and better science-fiction, and will perforce turn to the magazines which specialize in it.

So there you are. STARTLING STORIES from now on will bring you just twice as much fiction fare as it did. And with more authors given more opportunity to present their work, we expect a wider range of talent and originality than ever. We'll make you a promise, too; the quality of the literary menu in STARTLING STORIES will continue to progress over the years!

ETHERGRAMS

DON'T be confused by any irrelevancies in these letters. A lot of them are still addressed to Sam Merwin and they're too good fun not to print just as they are.

RETURN OF THE NATIVE
by Tom Covington

Dear Editor: Well, I see there have been some changes made in SS since I joined the Navy four months ago and temporarily lost contact with fandom. And, believe me, they're much, much for the better! Let me congratulate you on them. The decent covers are grand, and it's nice to know you think enough of us to let us know your name. 'Course we knew it before, but it feels better to have it official, to feel that we aren't a bunch of sneaks after all.

When I say the decent covers are grand, I mean they're WONDERFUL! And I do mean it! If you don't believe it, just look back over some of the letters I wrote in "the good old days." But, of course I know it would be impossible for you to keep the thousands of letters you receive from readers on file.

I always said Bergey could draw wonderfully if he had some decent subjects. Now he's proving it. And how! I've fallen in love with the wonderfully demure September cover girl—or face. I mean the brunette. Sigh. There's a universe of difference between her and the lewd, provocative wretches Bergey, then the hated name of promag art, used to paint. I shudder to think of the old type thing. I, as a fan, am really grateful for your change in cover policy. Please continue to give us such wonderful covers in the future.

Your lead novel was only fair. No, not that! Not the waste basket—yet. Read on, Sam, I can tell you WHY I think it was only fair: 'Twas cause I, the reader, didn't care whether Elspeth and Mack (thanks for the female protagonist, something unique in stf, I believe) saved all those worlds or not. That's a horrible thing to say, I know, since the reader is supposed to be in the strictest sympathy with the wishes of the hero, but, nevertheless, 'tis true. As far as my literary orbs can peer, you failed to give us a reason for the whole mess at the beginning of the story; you didn't tell us why the world had to be saved, but waited until the end of

(Continued on page 126)

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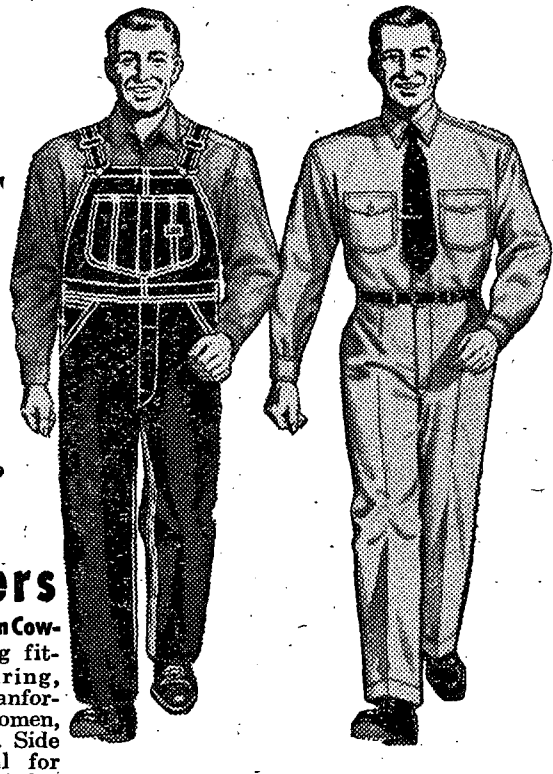

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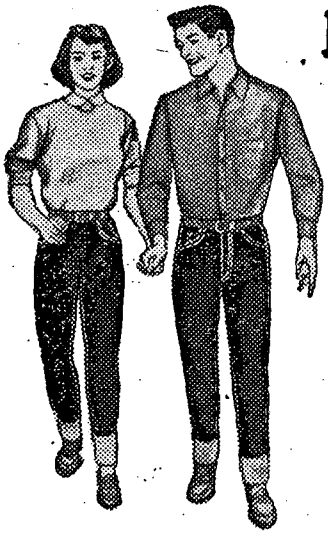

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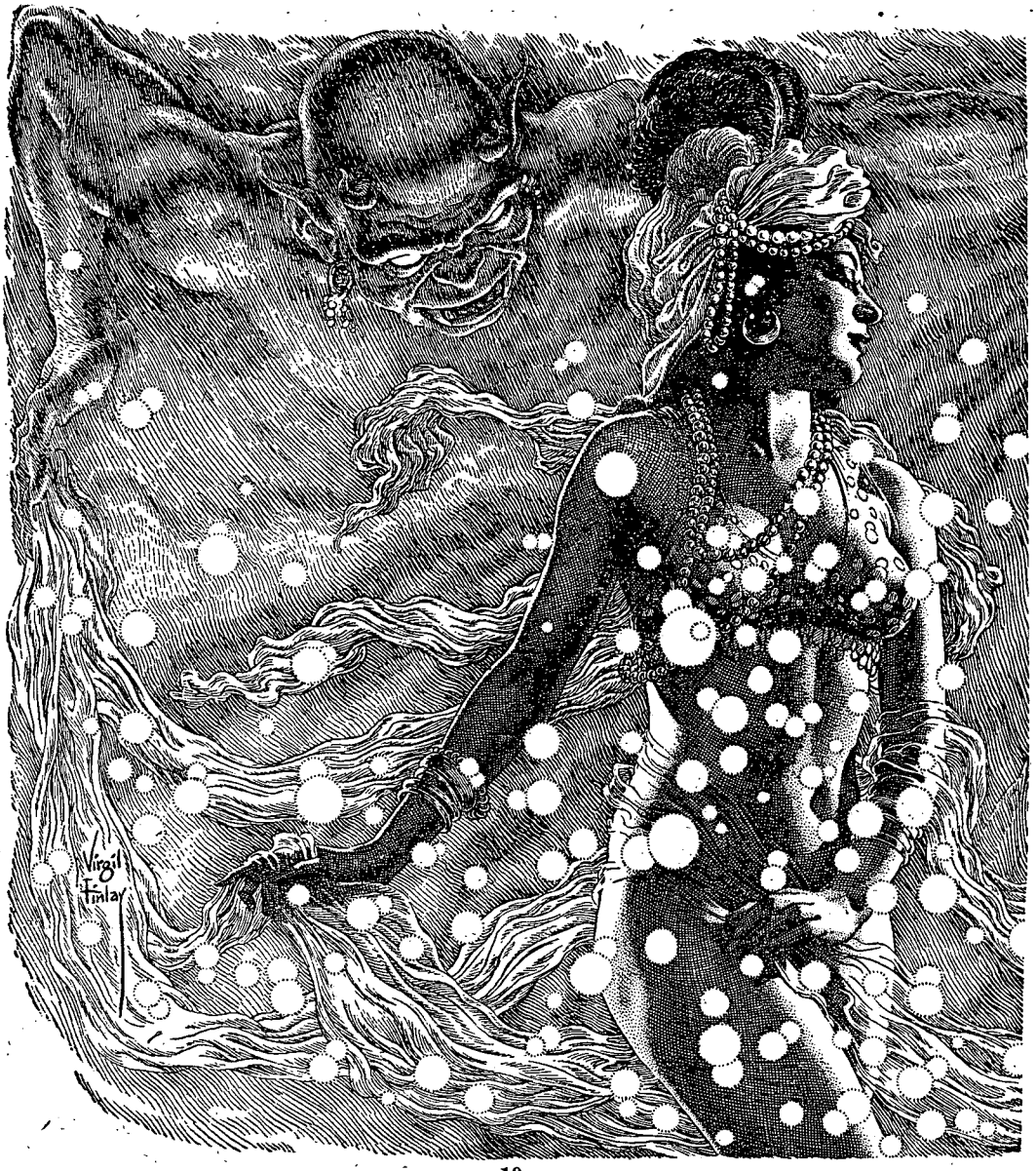
A Novel by MURRAY LEINSTER

JOURNEY



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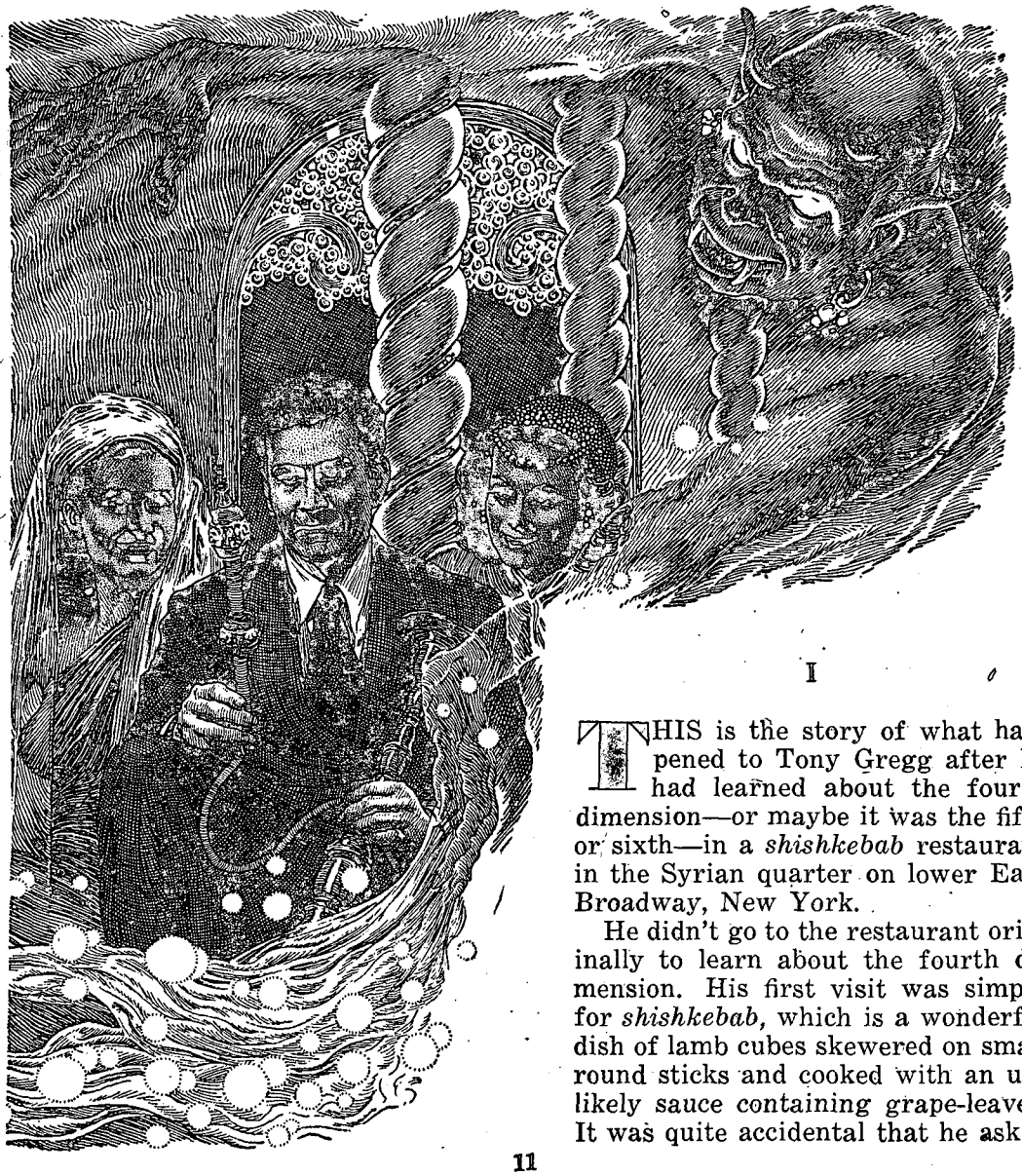
A hock-shop relic leads Tony Gregg to a riotous land of djinns and sins, dragons and dreams, walking castles and talking sand

TO BARKUT



I

THIS is the story of what happened to Tony Gregg after he had learned about the fourth dimension—or maybe it was the fifth or sixth—in a *shishkebab* restaurant in the Syrian quarter on lower East Broadway, New York.

He didn't go to the restaurant originally to learn about the fourth dimension. His first visit was simply for *shishkebab,* which is a wonderful dish of lamb cubes skewered on small round sticks and cooked with an unlikely sauce containing grape-leaves. It was quite accidental that he asked

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the owner of the restaurant about a coin that he—Tony—carried as a luck-piece.

Tony had bought it for a lucky charm in one of those tiny shops on side-streets in New York, where antique jewelry and ivory chessmen and similar wares are on display in the windows. He picked it out because it looked odd. His conscience—he had been raised with a very articulate conscience—reluctantly consented to the purchase because the coin was very heavy for its size and might be gold. (It certainly wasn't a medal, and therefore had to be a coin). It bore an inscription in conventionalized Arabic script on one side, and something on the other that looked like an elaborate throne without anybody sitting on it. But when Tony tried to look it up, there simply wasn't any record in any numismatic catalog of any coinage even resembling it.

ONE night—this was his first visit, not the later one when he learned about the fourth dimension—he went down on East Broadway for *shishkebab*, and it occurred to him to ask the Syrian restaurant-keeper what the Arabic inscription might say. The Syrian read it, frowned darkly, and told Tony that the coin was a ten-dirhim piece, that the inscription said it was a coin of Barkut—and that he had never heard of any place called Barkut. Neither had Tony. So Tony got a little curious about it, and the next day spent half an hour in the Fifth Avenue library trying to find out something about either the coin or the country it came from. But as far as the library was concerned, there wasn't any place called Barkut. Never had been.

The coin was solid gold, though. A jeweler verified that. As bullion, it was worth somewhere around six dollars. And since Tony had paid only a dollar and a half for it, he was rather pleased. Even his conscience smugly approved. It isn't often that you pick up anything in an antique-shop that you can sell for more than you paid for it, no matter what people tell you. So—Tony kept it for a luck-piece, and every night on the way home from the office he paused outside Paddy Scanlon's Bar and Grill and gravely tossed the coin to see whether he should have a drink or not. Which was a pretty good way of being neither too abstemious or too regular in such matters. His conscience approved of this, too.

He didn't really think the coin brought him good luck, but the small mystery of it intrigued him. He was a rather ordinary young man, was Tony. He'd enlisted in the Second World War, but had never got beyond a base camp although he'd howled for action. Instead, he sat on his rear and pounded a typewriter for three long years. Then he was discharged out and got his old job back—at the same old salary—and went back to his old lodging-house—at a bright new rate per week. Kind of a sour deal all around. So now he was glad he had the coin—because he liked to imagine things. His conscience sternly and constantly reminded him that he should be polite, attentive to his duties, efficient and no clock-watcher; and the radio reminded him every morning while he was dressing that he'd better use a specific tooth-paste, hair stickum, breath deodorant, and brand of popular-priced suits. It was pleasant therefore to have something vague and mysterious around, like the coin.

It couldn't have been made as a novelty or anything like that. Not when it was gold. But it came from no country anyone had ever heard of. He liked to think that there was some mystery about its having reached his hands; some significance in the fact that he had come to own it and no one else. To make it seem more significant, probably, he got into the habit of tossing it for all decisions of no particular moment. Whether to go to a ball-game or not. Whether or not to eat at his regular restaurant. On this excess, his conscience dourly reserved decision.

He'd owned the coin two months, and the habit of using it to make small deci-

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sions had become fixed, when one evening he tossed it to see whether or not he should go to his regular restaurant for dinner. It came tails. No. He was mildly amused. To another restaurant uptown? Tails again. He flipped and flipped and flipped. His common sense told him that he was simply running into a long sequence of tails. But he liked to think that the decisions of the coin were mysterious and significant. Tonight he got a little excited when one place after another was negatived. He ran out of restaurants he could remember having dined in. So he tossed his coin with the mental note that if it came heads he'd try a new restaurant, where he'd never dined before. But the coin came tails. Negative. Then he really racked his brains—and remembered the little Syrian restaurant down on lower East Broadway. He flipped for that. And the coin came heads.

HE GOT on the subway and rode downtown, while his conscience made scornful comments about superstition. He went into the small converted store with something of an anticipatory thrill. His way of life was just about as unexciting as anybody's life could be. He had been pretty well tamed by the way he was raised, which had created a conscience with a mind of its own and usually discouraging opinions. His conscience now spoke acidly, and he had to assure it that he didn't really believe that the coin meant anything, but that he only liked to pretend it did.

So he sat down at a table and automatically flipped the coin to see whether he should order *shishkebab* or not. The swarthy, slick-haired proprietor grinned at him. There was a bald-headed man at a table in the back—a man in impeccably tailored clothing, with gold-rimmed eyeglasses and the definite dark dignity of a Levantine of some sort.

"Say," said the proprietor, in wholly colloquial English. "You showed me a funny goldpiece last time you were here. Is it that? Mr. Emurian, back there, he knows a lot about that stuff. A very educated man! You want I should ask him about it?"

This seemed to Tony a mysterious coincidence. He agreed eagerly. The restaurant-keeper took the coin. He showed it to the bald-headed man. They talked at length, not in English. The restaurant-keeper came back.

"He never seen one like it," he reported. "And he never heard of Barkut, where it says it come from. But he says there's a kinda story about coins and things like that—things that come from places that nobody ever heard of. He'll tell you if you want."

A Modern Arabian Nights

EVERY once in a while an editor comes across a story which carries no weighty thoughts, preaches no sermon, grinds no axe, cuts no one's throat, but is sheer delightful entertainment. That editor would be a traitor to humanity if he did not immediately buy, borrow or steal said story and run it in his magazine. For entertainment and laughter are the gifts of the gods. And in the final balance who shall say whether wisdom or laughter is the greater good?

JOURNEY TO BARKUT is the Arabian Nights with a Leinster touch of its own. If you loved the amazing adventures; the color and glamor of those fabulous stories you'll need no further sales talk. Lock the doors, disconnect the 'phone, curl up with a tall glass and reacquaint yourself with the sheer joy of reading!

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"Please!" said Tony. He found his heart beating faster. "If he'll join me—"

"Oh, he'll have a cuppa coffee, maybe," said the restaurant-keeper. "On the house. He's a very educated man, Mr. Emurian is."

He went back. The bald-headed man rose and came with easy dignity toward Tony's table. His eyes twinkled. Tony was flustered because this Mr. Emurian looked so foreign and spoke such perfect English and was so perfectly at ease.

"There is a legend," he told Tony humorously, "which might amuse you—if I may put down my coffee-cup? Thank you." He sat. "It is an old wives' tale, and yet it fits oddly into the theories of Mr. Einstein and other learned men. But I know a man in Ispahan who would give you a great sum for that coin because of the legend. Would you wish to sell?"

Tony shook his head.

"Say—five hundred dollars?" asked Mr. Emurian, smiling behind his eyeglasses. "No? Not even a thousand? I will give you the address of the man who would buy it, if you ever wish to sell."

Tony was too flabbergasted to even shake his head.

Mr. Emurian laughed. "This man," he explained amiably, "would say that the coin comes from a country which is not upon our maps because it is unapproachable by any ordinary means. Yet it is wholly real and actually has a certain commerce with us. It is—hm—have you ever heard of worlds supposed to be like ours, but in other—ah—dimensions, say, or in parallel but not identical times?"

"I've read Wells' *'Time Machine,'*" said Tony awkwardly.

"Not at all the same," the dark man assured him. "And notions of startling new machines for traveling between sets of dimensions or in time itself are quite absurd. Discoveries of that sort are never drastic! When electricity was discovered, it was your own Franklin who observed that it was no new force, but quite commonplace. Every thunderstorm since time began had demonstrated it. Similarly, if travel between worlds or to other times should ever become really practical, it is certain that the discovery will not be dramatic. It will turn out that people have been doing it for centuries as a matter of course, without ever realizing it."

"You mean—" Tony stopped.

"The legend," said Mr. Emurian, "suggests that your coin came from a world not our own. That it came from a world where history quite truthfully denies much of the history we truthfully teach to children." He regarded Tony zestfully and said, "Ordinarily, two things which are equal to the same thing are equal to each other. But two places which are exactly equal to each other are identical—are the same place. Now consider! Suppose that somewhere there existed a world in which Aladdin's lamp existed and was in good working order. Suppose that upon that world there was a place which was absolutely identical with a place in this world. It would have to be a place where the working or not working of Aladdin's lamp made absolutely no difference. Now, according to the legend, those two places, on two worlds, would actually be one place which was on both worlds, and which would serve as a perfectly practical gateway between them. Travelers would pass casually through it without ever noticing it. You and I, perhaps, pass through such gateways every day without the least realization."

THE dark man seemed to find amused satisfaction in the look of mystified enthusiasm on Tony's face. He waved a manicured hand.

"Look at this restaurant. Here. Tonight," he said, beaming. "Today, for example, Calcutta could have vanished in a tidal wave and be sunk forever under the sea. Or it could not. Here and now, we knowing nothing about it, such an event would still have made no slightest difference. So that from this restau-

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rant tonight we could walk out into two different worlds—you into the one where such an event had taken place, and I into the world where it did not. And I might go and live peacefully and die of old age in the Calcutta which to you was utterly destroyed."

"But we are in the same world!" protested Tony. "We'll stay in the same world!"

"Probably, but are you sure?" Mr. Emurian twinkled through his glasses. "We have never seen each other before. How do you know that I have always lived in this particular world? How do you know that the history of the world in which I was born is the same? I was surely not taught the same history! And if we separate here tonight, and you never see or hear of me again, how will you know that I remain in the world you inhabit?"

Tony said painfully, but with his heart beating fast:

"I—guess I won't. But there's no proof, either, that—"

"We agree," said Mr. Emurian, nodding. "There can be no proof. I have told you a legend. It says that there are other worlds. They are not quite real to us, because we cannot reach them at will. But according to legend they touch each other at many places, and it is possible to travel from one to another, and in fact we constantly visit the frontier-cities of other worlds without ever knowing it. We do not know it, because we are a part of our own world, and there is an attraction; a magnetism; a gravitation, perhaps; which draws us back before we stray far through the gateway of a world which is not our own."

He regarded Tony benevolently through his eyeglasses.

"As for your coin—sometimes that gravitation or that attraction is not enough. We stray deep into other worlds and doubtless we are very unhappy. Or an object from another world strays into ours. But always the gravitation or the magnetism remains to some de-

GHAIL

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gree. That is what my friend in Ispahan believes—so firmly that he might be willing to pay you as much as two thousand dollars for the coin in your hand."

Tony looked at the coin with deep respect. He had never in all his life before owned anything worth even a fraction of two thousand dollars. His conscience spoke in no uncertain terms. He said slowly:

"I—suppose I ought to sell it, then. I can't really afford to carry around a luck-piece as valuable as that. I—might lose it." After a moment, he said wistfully: "I suppose your friend is a coin-collector?"

"Not at all," said Mr. Emurian. "He is a business man. He would use the coin, I am sure, to get into this other world and set up a branch of his business there. He would import Barkutian dates or dried figs or rugs, or possibly gold and frankincense and myrrh. He might deal in ivory and apes and peacocks in exchange for Birmingham cutlery, printed cotton cloth, and kerosene lamps. And if the atmosphere were congenial he might establish a residence there, staffed with pretty slave-girls and Mameluk guards, and settle down to a life of comfortable luxury with no fear of atomic bombs and communism."

Tony said more wistfully still:

"How would the coin guide him to Barkut?"

Mr. Emurian gently shook an admonitory finger.

"You accept my legend as fact, my dear sir! You are a romantic!" Then he added comfortably: "I do not know how he would use the coin as a guide. I do know that he would consider that it was not quite real in this world, and hence should be exempt from some physical laws. He would expect it to have some tendency to become more real, which it could only do by returning to its own time and place. How the tendency would show itself, I cannot guess. But I will write down my friend's name and address. I promise that he will pay you a high price for your token."

Tony Gregg looked almost hungrily at the coin. An idea came into his head. His conscience, its eyes on that two thousand, protested indignantly.

"I'll let the coin decide," he said unhappily. "Heads I sell it, tails I don't."

He tossed. The coin thumped on the table. Tails. He gulped in relief and pushed back his chair.

"It's settled," he said, flushing a little in his excitement. "And—and I won't take your friend's address because I—don't want to be able to change my mind."

Mr. Emurian beamed.

"A romantic!" he said approvingly. "It is admirable! I wish you good fortune, sir!"

Tony thanked him confusedly and paid his bill and departed.

OUTSIDE, in the spottily lighted street, he felt more or less dazed; his conscience prodded him, bitingly reproachful, demanding that he go back and get the address he had just refused. This was in the Syrian quarter, on lower East Broadway, with signs in Arabic in those scattered shop-windows still lighted. Most of the buildings about were dark and silent, and there were only very occasional lumbering trucks for traffic. The atmosphere was a compound of the exotic and the commonplace that did not make for clear thinking. The facts were staggering, too. If the coin in Tony's pocket was worth two thousand dollars, that in itself was to make him dizzy. He had never carried more than a week's salary in his pocket at any time, and never that for long.

So he rode uptown on a subway train which had come from Atlantic Avenue, Brooklyn, and would go uptown only to Times Square. At Times Square he changed trains like a sleep-walker and went further uptown still. He was lost in excited, dazzled speculation which hardly let him notice his surroundings. He had come up from the subway exit and was walking toward his lodging when he realized he'd been too agitated

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to eat the *shishkebab* he'd paid for. He came to a diner, and was still hungry. He automatically flipped the coin. It came heads. He went into the diner. The man at the stool next to him got up and went out. He left a paper that he'd stuck under him when he finished with it. Tony thriftily retrieved it while waiting for his hamburger and coffee. Then a thrill went all the way down his backbone and he nearly choked. The paper was *Racing Form.*

On the way uptown Tony'd had a bitter argument with his infuriated conscience. He'd insisted defensively that if an importer of dates and dried figs and rugs in Ispahan could find profit in a journey to Barkut, why couldn't an up-and-coming young American do even better? Tony was no business man, but he'd been trained to believe that anybody who did not desire above all things to be a brisk young executive had something wrong with him. So he'd been insisting feverishly that commerce in electric refrigerators, nylon stockings, fertilizer, lipstick and bubble gum was his life's ambition, and this was his chance! But actually, his mind had kept slipping off sidewise to visions of white-walled cities under a blazing sun, and of lustrous-eyed slave-girls and *mameluks* armed with scimitars, and of camel-caravans winding over desert wastes.

It was in a hopeless confusion of such images that he left the diner and went to his room, clutching *Racing Form* fast. He sat up till long past midnight, flipping the coin and charting out a crucial test of its virtues. He dreamed chaotically all night, and when morning came he awoke with common-sense—i.e. his conscience—reviling him bitterly for his plans.

But he would not be shamed out of them. His conscience grew strident and then almost hysterical, he sneaked out of the house with a hang-dog air as if to avoid his own eyes, and rode to Belmont racetrack with his hat pulled down over his forehead. When he put down the first two dollars at the betting window his conscience had been reduced to the point of simply jeering at him for a fool and a romantic, refusing a chance to sell a crazy luck-piece for two thousand dollars so he could use it to guide him in making two-dollar bets! A horse named Rainy Sunday? said his conscience derisively. Tomorrow would be Black Friday when he was fired for taking an unauthorized day off!

But Rainy Sunday won, paying six for two. Then Occiput paid off. Then, in order, Slipstream, and Miss Inflation, and Quiz Kid, and Armageddon . . . and the daily double. . . .

Tony rode back to town in a sort of stunned composure. He had a trifle—a few hundred—more than eleven thousand dollars in his pocket. His conscience told him with icy disapproval that it had all been coincidence, and that now the proper thing for him to do was put that eleven thousand dollars in good, conservative securities, and never go near a race-track again.

So Tony went up to his room, and packed in feverish haste while his conscience yammered at him in mounting agitation, and paid his rooming-house bill and went out and flagged a taxi while the mood of resolution—and escape—was upon him. In the taxi he flipped the coin to see where he should head in order to take the coin nearer to Barkut. If there was a mysterious attraction trying to pull the coin back to its own world, it would obviously work on probability, operating to cause coincidences that would take it home. And if somebody was letting it guide him by flipping it for heads and tails. . . .

Well, there was eleven thousand dollars to make the theory seem likely.

A couple of weeks later Tony considered the theory proved. At that time he had reached, he was fairly sure, a place well off any imaginable map of the world he had been born in. He stood on a sandy beach with blue sea to his left and desert on all other sides. A middle-sized whirlwind or sand-devil spun meditatively in one place a quarter-mile

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away, seeming to watch.

Tony had one desert Arab, very much unwashed, squirming under his right foot, and two other equally unwashed scoundrels coming furiously at him with spears from right and left. At this moment he thought irrelevantly, but not at all regretfully, of the tossings of the coin that had begun his journey.

He did not have time for philosophizing, however. So he swung the long, curved scimitar in his hand, pulled his belted-in-the-back topcoat out of the way with his left hand, and faced his would-be assassins.

II

IT COULD have been a very happy journey—up to the unwashed scoundrels, at least—but Tony's conscience had tried to spoil everything. It spoke with an inflection very much like the maiden aunt who'd raised him. Tony would get into trouble, said his conscience gloomily, for slipping off without a passport, and actually bribing somebody to help him do it. He should have paid the income-tax on that eleven thousand dollars and put the rest in gilt-edged bonds. He should not have flown across the South Atlantic in a plane of such antiquity, to a flying-field in Tunisia instead of to a proper airport where he would have been arrested for not having proper papers. He should not have slugged the Tunisian customs-official who was planning to arrest him anyhow, even though the coin had blithely come heads when tossed for the decision. And certainly, having done so, he should not have tucked a hundred-dollar bill in officialdom's fingers for the man to find when he came to. To be sure, the official had pocketed the bill and kept his mouth shut, but fifty would have been enough. After all, where was more money coming from when this was gone, and what was Tony gaining in exchange for wasted cash?

So said Tony's conscience, which was a born killjoy. He ignored it as much as he could. It was exhilarating to dodge regulations and red tape after a lifetime subject to them. His conscience said aggrievedly that he was now a felon and would presently be confined in a jail with primitive sanitary arrangements. Tony's maiden aunt, who had formed his conscience, had been hell on sanitation.

But Tony paid no heed. He spent money lavishly and got in return things which he prized highly. A sight of the sun setting on the desert. Once a bare glimpse of a dusky Arab damsel's face when the wind blew aside her veil. The smell of horses and camels and the East generally—concentrated it was bad, but when sufficiently diluted it was delectable—and that gorgeous time near the end of his journeying when a skinny thief tried to rob him in the bazaar at Suakim on the Red Sea and Tony grandly rescued him from the blows of indignant merchants who had meant to rob Tony in another manner. Afterward, too, he'd hired the thief to be his guide and interpreter. The coin came heads when he tossed it for the decision.

These things gave him satisfactions not to be obtained from the actions approved by commonsense and the code of conduct a right-thinking young future executive should abide by. Tony thrived on them. He put on weight. He grew sunburned. Contentedly going where the toss of a coin suggested, knowing nothing of what the next instant would bring except that it would be unexpected, he straightened up from what had been an incipient book-keeper's stoop. He walked with a freer motion and looked—this was the odd part—a much more likely prospect for a young executive's job than he had ever looked before.

His conscience grudgingly conceded as much, but waxed ever more bitter as Tony spent his funds lavishly for progress toward whatever unknown destination the supposedly homing coin would lead him to. Curiously, the coin did come an almost mathematically exact number

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of heads and tails over a reasonable period of time. The laws of chance were not broken by an excess of heads, or tails, or excessively long runs of either. There could be absolutely no guarantee that Tony's travels were guided by anything but purest arbitrary chance. But his journeying was convincingly direct, when he plotted it on a map. He'd come as straight as transportation facilities would allow to Suakim on the Red Sea.

SUAKIM is and always will be a hot and sleepy and odorous town full of Arabs, Tamils, Somalis, and other persons who regard non-Moslems—their official rulers included—as the destined and legitimate prey of the Faithful. Tony's newly-hired interpreter considered Tony his express and particular prey. For a time he tried valiantly to collect by wheedling Tony to make purchases on which he—the interpreter—would collect commissions of from fifty to seventy-five per cent. For one long night he waited hopefully for Tony to snore, so that he could rob his baggage. But Tony slept dreamlessly and silently, like a child.

Then the interpreter's opportunity came.

On the third day of Tony's stay in Suakim—the coin came invariably tails at any suggestion of departure—Tony made some small purchase in the bazaar. He gave an Egyptian pound in payment. In the change there was a small silver coin with an inscription in conventionalized Arabic script on one sde, and an ornate, empty throne on the other. Tony regarded it with apparent calm. He showed it to his hired thief.

"This is a coin of Barkut," he told the man who was itching to rob him. "It is my desire to go to Barkut. Arrange it."

He went back to the fly-infested hotel, where he paid nine prices for his lodging. He spent some time flipping the coin. He had changed a good deal inside as well as out, once he'd learned how to grow really stern with his conscience. The coin turned up some heads and some tails. If it actually had a homing instinct, it gave him essential information. If everything had been a matter of chance up to now, and the series of coincidences between fact and the heads-and-tails decisions of the coin were about to end, it simply led him to preparations for an over-elaborate suicide.

Within the hour, his interpreter came back to the hotel with voluble assurances that he had engaged a *bakhil* to carry Tony to Barkut. It was taking on the last of its cargo now. It would put out into the harbor at sunset, and Tony must board it secretly during the night because of harbor regulations.

Tony packed. He was reasonably well outfitted, now. He dressed for his journey in the absolute ultimate of the inappropriate. He wore a soft felt hat, brightly-polished brown shoes, and a camel's-hair topcoat with a belt in the back. He slipped a revolver in his pocket.

Night fell. Tony dined, as well as the resources of Suakim would permit, and felt expansive and contented and anticipative. Two hours after dark, his interpreter returned with news that the *bakhil* was out in the harbor and awaited his coming. Tony went down to the water-front of Suakim—a not too cautious move in itself, alone and at night. He climbed down a ladder into a small boat and placidly let himself be rowed out into the darkness. The night was black, save that stars glowed enormously against a sky like velvet. The sleepy, murmurous sounds of the city were very romantic indeed. There was the lapping of waves, and somewhere a wraith of string music where revelers made merry, and somewhere a dog barked indignantly in the darkness. That was all, except the sound of the oars.

Presently a dark form loomed ahead. The *bakhil* was an ungainly shape some seventy or eighty feet long, with the stubby thick mast and colossal boom of her lateen rig. Tony's interpreter hailed.

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A guttural voice replied. The small boat came alongside the *bakhil* and the interpreter steadied it for Tony to step on board. He climbed to the deck. The *bakhil* stank glamorously of fish and pearl-oysters and goat-hides and kerosene and tar and bilge-water and humanity. Its deck was an impenetrable maze of shadows in the starlight. Tony drew a deep breath of completest satisfaction. He moved aside to be out of the way.

Then there was an infuriated howl, plus the sound of oars being worked at most enthusiastic speed. Tony's interpreter and guide had obsequiously held the small boat to allow him to board the *bakhil*. The unwashed cutthroats of its crew had prepared to receive Tony's baggage. Instead, they saw and heard the shore-boat being rowed away at the topmost speed of which the interpreter was capable.

THE *bakhil's* crew howled with rage, which was not righteous indignation at the witnessing of a theft, but the much greater rage of being cheated of the privilege of stealing Tony's possessions for themselves. Men raved up and down the deck, uttering deep-throated maledictions at the top of their voices. Then, forward, the loudest voice shouted down the others. A small boat from the *bakhil* splashed overside. It went cursing after the racing oar-strokes of the boat with Tony's baggage in it.

Tony stepped delicately to the stern and ensconced himself against the rail. He got a cigarette-lighter and lighted a cigarette and smoked it happily, still holding the lighter in his hand. This event had been implied in the series of heads and tails the golden coin of Barkut had turned up when he spun it for decisions on how he should prepare for the trip by sea. All this uproar was consoling confirmation of the homing tendency of the ten-dirhim piece. He smoked beatifically, while out on the dark harbor-water one small boat manned by cutthroats went raging after another small boat manned by a sneak-thief, and the crew of the *bakhil* listened between cursings to the sounds on the water.

Far off, there was a howl of fury. Still farther, a triumphant yell of derision. The small boat of the *bakhil* came back in a thick fog of sulphurous language, Tony's late interpreter evidently having made the shore and gotten away with his loot.

The boat's crew scrambled to the deck. The boat itself was made fast overside. There was much muttered talk. Then men came astern to where Tony smoked in blissful excitement. They circled him deliberately. He snapped his cigarette-lighter. Its glow showed him the villainous bearded faces of the *bakhil's* crew. Hairy chests and ragged garments. Knives gleaming and ready.

And the lighter's flame showed them Tony, puffing joyously on a cigarette, with one hand holding the lighter with its flickering flame, and the other holding a cocked revolver.

There was a pause without words.

Then a launch's internal-combustion-engine caught somewhere. It began to run with a sort of purring roar. A harbor-launch. A police-launch, probably, ready to investigate the howls of fury on the harbor's dark waters. If Tony were murdered here and now, his body might have to be slid overboard still unrobbed, and even that would be dangerous. More, he might kill somebody first.

The sound of the police-launch motor moved across the harbor. A voice grunted urgently on the *bakhil's* deck, and the group before Tony melted. Men swarmed to ropes and spars. The great lateen sail rose creaking against the sky, and forward, men hauled feverishly at a crude windlass to lift the *bakhil's* anchor. Then slowly, slowly, slowly, in what were hardly catspaws of wind off the land, the *bakhil* gathered way.

It moved creakingly but very smoothly over the water. When the police-launch was at its nearest, Tony tossed his cigarette overboard and blandly

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The roc was twenty feet away, its cavernous beak widening in terrible and hungry menace

watched it go by. He was contentedly confident that all went well.

But his conscience wailed, as the police-launch departed. Now he would be killed, and there would be nobody in all the world who would ever admit to the least idea of his fate. He could be traced —perhaps!—to Suakim, though even that was unlikely. But from Suakim on he would seem to have evaporated. With dawn, the *bakhil* would be remote from all witnesses to happenings on its deck. Tony would be murdered and robbed, and his few remaining possessions divided among these cutthroats who had

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surely no intention of taking him to any agreed-on destination! And what good had he done, or even tried to do? Even if he unthinkably escaped murder, now, he had not even pretended to make inquiries in Suakim on the probable products of Barkut, of the market it might offer for imports, or even of the possible profit in import-export trade! He had thrown away his life, and more—here Tony's conscience grew acrimonious—he had not made one single move that a brisk young executive would have made first of all!

III

THE *bakhil* cleared the harbor. The wind freshened, and she bent to the breeze and her forefoot cut into the swells. Tony smoked contentedly. He reflected that something like this untraceability was necessary for a journey to Barkut and other places not on topographic surveys. If the area about a gateway were ever searched for a person who had gone through it, that very search would change it, so that somehow it would cease to be identical in the two worlds, and so would cease to be a gateway. In ancient days, when news traveled slowly and searches for missing persons were unthought of, there must have been many gateways indeed. That would account for the wild fables which none believed, nowadays, but which were probably history in some world or other. There was probably a brisk trade between places where magic lamps were functional devices, and prosaic places like the world of Tony's youth. Now gateways were probably rare and trade almost non-existent. But not quite. He had the proof of that!

So Tony grinned happily to himself in the starlight at the *bakhil's* stern. He let his imagination run riot in pictures of white-walled cities under a brazen sky, and camel-caravans in slow motion over fabled sands, and—to be honest about it—he meditated with some interest upon the possibility of lustrous-eyed slave-girls whose sense of duty to their mast might make them very interesting companions—if one happened to be the master.

When the sun rose he was still thinking about the sort of residence a successful young executive might set up i Barkut if that land were as uninhibite as the bald-headed man had suggeste in the *shishkebab* restaurant. But abou him there was no sign of any sort c civilization. The *bakhil* glided smoothl over waves that were neither high no negligible. The sea was of an improbabl but fascinating color. The sky was lapis lazuli, and the *bakhil* was sheer archai clumsiness. The heavy, bending boor which carried her mainsail seemed abou to crack with the burden of patched can vas and wind which strained it. Th crew was as unsavory a gang of cut throats as ever a director sought in vai for a motion-picture. There was not a man who did not carry a knife in plai view, and few who had not been liber ally scarred by the knives of others. Th captain's face looked very like a rough sketch for a crossword puzzle blank.

None spoke a word to Tony. All glowered when he met their eyes. The *bakhi* sailed on a course Tony could not deter mine, toward a destination he could no guess—except that it surely was no Barkut—and there was apparently n soul on board but himself who spoke English or had any feeling but that o murderous antipathy toward him.

He flipped the golden ten-dirhim piece and felt exceeding peace fill all his being. Crew-members saw the glint of gold in the sunshine. If Tony moved from the rail and one of them could get behind him, the result would be final. If he dozed, he would wake in another world, but not very likely Barkut. His life hung upon the fact that he had a revolver, and that it might cost lives to kill him. He waited contentedly all through the baking-hot day for nightfall, quite well aware that with the darkness plans would take effect to abate the nuisance of his living presence.

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Came the sunset. Glorious reds and golds. The surface of the sea looked like molten aureate metal. The whiskered villains of the *bakhil's* crew prostrated themselves in pious prayer unto Allah, and then began low-toned discussions over the most practical way of inserting some six or seven inches of steel into Tony's liver.

He beamed. He was alive. This was life and zest and adventure such as he had never known or dreamed of before. His conscience was despairingly silent. Tony would not have changed places with anyone on earth.

THE sun sank below the horizon. Darkness seemed to flow over the world from the horizon on every hand. Obscurity blotted out the edge of the world, and shadows appeared and grew opaque upon the *bakhil's* deck, and Suhail, the great star, shone brightly in a dimming sky. Then it was night.

Men gathered forward. And Tony tossed overboard his twentieth cigarette of the day, and heard it hiss briefly as it touched the water. He moved briskly, silently.

The helmsman closed his eyes and sank to the deck. Darkness hid his sorrow. He had been the victim of a scientific gun-whipping learned by Tony in a neighborhood movie palace on Amsterdam Avenue, while watching Randolph Scott in the role of a frontier marshall. Tony re-pocketed the revolver, hauled the trailing small boat close under the *bakhil's* stern; then he pushed the great tiller hard over. The lubberly *bakhil* came heavily up into the wind and hung there. Its lateen sail flapped crazily. The ship careened, the massive boom swung over and increased its heel, and then the *bakhil* seemed simply to shiver irresolutely, dead in the water, all way gone.

Tony slipped over the stern into the small boat. He took to the oars as displeased outcry arose on deck. He pulled off into the darkness. He had no idea where he might be, save that he was roughly twenty hours slow sail from Suakim. He might be anywhere along the African eastern coast, or along either of two shores of Arabia. The essential thing was to get away from the *bakhil* where his murder was at the moment being loudly promised.

He got away. When some sort of order seemed to be restored on the ship, he ceased his rowing and muffled his oars. Then he went back to work, pulling sturdily upwind. The *bakhil* had somewhat the sailing properties of an ordinary washtub. Pulling upwind from her, he might progress faster to windward by manpower than she could by sail. Certainly, once he was lost in the darkness she would never find him again.

She did not. After half an hour, Tony Gregg—clad in soft felt hat, highly polished brown shoes, and a camel's-hair top-coat belted in the back—curled himself up on the bottom-boards of the little boat and went contentedly to sleep. His last conscious thought was a mild wonderment that even this landing-boat had a pervading aroma of fish, pearl-oysters, goat-hides, bilge-water, kerosene, and the unwashed humanity that occupied it recently.

Bumpings awakened him. The boat's keel thumped on a sandy bottom. He opened his eyes and saw a colossal, amiably stupid face gazing open-mouthed down at him. He knew immediately that it was an illusion, because it was five feet from ear to ear and definitely on the misty side—a countenance formed in vapor. He closed his eyes resolutely and told himself to wake up. When he opened them again there was naturally nothing in sight but very blue, very clear sky above the gunwale. But the boat bumped again. Tony sat up and saw a sandy shore and a sandy beach and a sandy stretch of pure barrenness beyond. There was no surf. Fairly gentle waves bumped the small boat, and bumped it again, and gradually edged it toward the strand on which the swells broke in half-hearted foaming.

There was just one really curious feature about the world he saw. That oddity

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was a minor, dark-colored whirlwind—actually a sand-devil—which wavered its way along the beach a hundred yards away. It looked—the thought was fanciful—rather like the picture, of a *djinn* coming out of a bottle that had been in a copy of the *Arabian Nights* Tony had owned as a small boy. He noted the resemblance, but of course thought no more of it. For one thing, there was no bottle. For another, this small whirlwind traveled in a wholly natural fashion. It went a couple of hundred yards further and then seemed to stop, spinning in a meditative fashion.

TONY sat at ease until the boat finally grounded. Then he seized the moment of a receding wave to step overside and walk smartly ashore without wetting more than the soles of his low-cut shoes. Safely on land, he was—and almost infinitely alone. There was sea on the one hand, and sand on the other. That was all. There was not even a seabird flapping over the waves. Only the whirling sand-devil remained to break stillness. It was rather peculiar that it was so dark, when whirling above such white sand. It looked rather like smoke.

He flipped the ten-dirhim piece. He marched valiantly along the shore in obedience to its decision. He covered half a mile. The whirlwind persisted. It moved inland. It grew taller, as if to keep him in view. Odd. . . .

Then three men on camels came over the crest of a sand-dune and halted, regarding him. He waved to them. They came toward him, shading their eyes to search for possible companions beyond and behind him. But he was patently alone. They gobbled in low tones at one another.

They came closer and dismounted and regarded him with cat-in-canary-cage smiles. They were whiskered, they were dirty, and they were almost certainly verminous. One, short and fat, fingered a scimitar suggestively. The other two carried spears. The small whirlwind moved restlessly, half a mile away. The three men ignored it.

Tony flipped the ten-dirhim piece. It glittered goldenly in the sunshine. The expressions of the trio changed from merely ominous greed to resolution. The short man with the scimitar swaggered up to Tony. The two others watched with glittering eyes. The short man said something that probably meant "Gimme!" Tony flipped the ten-dirhim piece. The man with the scimitar scowled and grabbed. Tony swung. Hard, to the whiskers. He felt a certain naive pride when the whiskered man went flat on his back, wheezing in astonishment. He snatched up the scimitar and said sternly to the others:

"I'm on my way to Barkut. But I'll glad to pay you—"

The other two men came for him at a run. They had very practical spears, which they carried in an accustomed manner. They made for him from two sides, one from the right and one from the left. A scimitar is not a weapon for use against spears. Moreover, Tony found it necessary to keep his foot on the wriggling, wheezing fat man to keep him still. These were desert Arabs—Bedouin—to whom the possession of goods is a sign of luck but by no means of inviolate personal ownership. If somebody has something they want and they can with reasonable safety take it, they do so, rejoicing.

Tony learned this fact later. At the moment he was only aware that they meant definitely to kill him for the ten-dirhim piece whose glint in the sunshine had roused their cupidity. They were remote from all law or other reasons for restraint. The spearmen plunged for him, eyes intent. Tony thought, in one masterpiece of irrelevant reflection, of the moment when he had begun this journey by flipping a coin. But still he would not have changed places with anybody in the world.

He took action. It was pure instinct. The scimitar in his hand had a good deal of the feel of a slightly heavy tennis-racquet. It even balanced like a racquet.

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The left-hand spearman was nearest.

Tony swung the scimitar as for a neat back-hand return-volley stroke. The head of the spear sprang off. Quickly he turned and with the scimitar served a fast though imaginary ball straight over the net. He followed through. The second spearman got in the way. They still followed through. He saw his victim with unforgettable clarity—pure, bearded villainy, with one eye and a sword-split nose. Then the scimitar landed. The result was colorful—mostly red—and unquestionably lethal. Tony wanted to be sick, and to avoid it he turned on his two remaining foes. The short fat man was on his feet now, still wheezing. The spearman looked dazed. They ran. Tony chased them with his reddened scimitar. They headed at first straight for the whirlwind, but then swerved around it, almost warily, just as it obligingly started to get out of their way. They vanished over sandhills.

Tony stopped, panting. He went back to the scene of the conflict. He carefully did not look at the man he'd hit with the scimitar. There were three camels, still kneeling. Tony wanted to get away from there. He tethered two of them to the third, and mounted that one. Nothing happened. He kicked it.

The camel, offensively chewing a reeking cud, got up hind-end first, and Tony nearly fell off. Then it resignedly began to move in some indefinite direction. The other two camels followed docilely. The whirlwind moved companionably along with them—never very near, but never quite out of sight. At times it was a mile away and of respectable size. Sometimes it was only a couple of hundred yards off, and not more than twenty or thirty feet high. But it followed persistently, rather like an interested stray dog following a man whose smell fascinates it.

Hours later—many hours later—a whitewalled city appeared in the distance. Date-groves surrounded it. There were minarets within the wall, and a

[*Turn page*]

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lacy structure comparable for beauty of design to the Taj Mahal—only the Taj Mahal is a tomb. A camel-caravan moved unhurriedly away from its gates, bound for some place of mystery on beyond.

The whirlwind fell behind, as if bashful. It stretched upward and upward—again as if to keep Tony in sight—until it was merely the most tenuous of mistinesses. That was when he was almost at the edge of the oasis. Then it vanished suddenly, as if it had collapsed.

Tony Gregg rode up to the nearest city gate and slid down his camel's off fore-leg, which stank. Soldiers in turbans and slippers and carrying flint-lock muskets looked at him in lively suspicion. He essayed to speak. They essayed to speak. Then they all stared. Presently two of them took him gingerly by the arm and led him through the city streets.

The smells and sights and sounds he encountered were those of a dream-city—though the smells were not altogether those of a pretty dream. There were flat-topped houses and veiled women and proud camels and bearded men. There were barred, narrow windows and metal-studded doors, and projecting upper storeys to the houses which leaned out above the narrow streets and nearly blotted out the sky.

The two soldiers led Tony, thrilled and satisfied, into a dark doorway. They released him. They stepped back. There was a conclusive *clang*. And Tony saw that the doorway was completely filled by a grille of very solid and very heavy grim iron bars, through which he and the soldiers blinked at each other. He was in a prison. He was in a partially open-air dungeon. He was, in fact, in the clink.

This was the manner of his arrival in Barkut.

IV

THREE weeks later, in mid-morning, Tony sat comfortably in the shady part of the courtyard and looked more or less dreamily at the slave-girl Ghail's legs. She had nice legs, and rather a lot of them was on display. They were slim, as a girl's legs ought to be, and they tapered nicely to the knee, and then they flared just the right amount at just the right place below them, and went down to very nice ankles, and below them to small bare feet—very dusty at the moment—one of which tapped ominously on the floor of the courtyard. He was still kept behind a locked iron grate, technically imprisoned, and his conscience had had a swell time pointing out to him how completely irresponsible and hair-brained and half-witted all his actions had been. He was, however, unworried except over the reaction that tapping foot might presage.

At first, of course, he'd been totally unable to speak Arabic, and nobody in Barkut seemed to be able to speak English. He'd tried to communicate from his original prison cell with the help of a dog-eared guide-book he'd picked up second-hand in Suez. The vocabulary it offered, however, was limited. It gave the phrases for complaining that prices were too high, that the food was overripe, and that the speaker wanted to go back to his hotel. But in Barkut Tony had been charged nothing, the food was good if monotonous—though fresh ripe dates had been a revelation to him—and he was in jail and had no hotel. After two days of this unsatisfactory conversation, he'd been moved to a convenient cell-and-courtyard in the palace. He'd been inspected by various whiskered people he thought were officials, and then the slave-girl Ghail had appeared and resolutely set to work to teach him to talk.

That was the way she undoubtedly looked at it. Tony was presumably an adult male, but he babbled only a few Arabic words, and those with a vile accent. The slave-girl had settled down to the job with something like a scowl. She had an imperial carriage, which Tony recalled vaguely could be credited to the carriage of burdens on her head as a

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child. She was long-legged and lissome and had an air of firm competence, and he knew she was a slave-girl because married women and the marriageable daughters of citizens walked the streets —if at all—only when swathed in voluminous robes and with veils which complied with the strictest of Moslem traditions. This girl Ghail was not swathed to speak of, and she was not veiled at all, and she was distinctly pretty and very far from shapeless. And she regarded Tony with a scowling disparagement which made him work earnestly to learn to carry on a conversation.

Matters had progressed nicely in three weeks, and Tony found himself possessed of a talent for languages. But now she tapped her foot ominously on the floor of his comfortable prison. She said, in measured calm:

"Now, just what do you mean by that?"

Tony spoke apologetically. But he was pleased with the fluency he displayed in the Arabic she had taught him.

"I wanted to know."

"And just why did you want to know the name of my owner and the value in money that is placed upon me?" demanded the girl.

"Sooner or later," explained Tony, trying hard to be convincing, "I shall be questioned by the rulers of this place. I think that is why you have been set to teach me the language. When I am questioned and can explain myself, I shall become high in favor, and rich. It was my thought that then—Allah permitting—I would purchase you from your owner."

The slave-girl's foot tapped more forbiddingly still.

"And for what purpose," she demanded icily, "would you wish to purchase me?"

TONY looked at her in pained astonishment. His conscience mentioned acidly that this conversation was not only improper but indiscreet. A brisk young executive would never . . . To which Tony replied that he wouldn't have much fun, then. When his conscience began a heated rejoinder, he cut it short.

"Truly," said Tony in false piety, "somebody has undoubtedly said that the desires of a man's heart are many, but that if there is not one woman more desirable than all else, he is not human."

His Arabic was still sketchy, but he put it over. The girl's eyes, however, instead of warming, burned angrily.

"You are human?" she demanded.

"All too human," admitted Tony, "what else?"

She stood up in queenly indignation. She smiled—but painfully and with contempt, like someone speaking to a half-wit or worse.

"You came across the desert from the sea," she said tolerantly, "riding one camel and leading two others. But an hour before your coming, one of the watchers on the city wall had seen a *djinn* in the desert. When you came, so stupid that you could not even speak the language of humans, do you think we did not know you for what you are—a *djinn?*"

"A *djinn?*" said Tony blankly. The word was one of the very few—alcohol was another—which would be the same in Arabic and English. "Do you mean those creatures of the Thousand and One Nights?"

"Of history, yes." Ghail's tone was bitingly scornful. "And if we had doubted, within the hour there came a Bedouin to the city gate, a one-eyed man with a sword-slit nose, who told us of your taking the form of a bale of rich silk, torn open upon the beach of the sea. When he and his companions alighted from their camels to gather up the wealth, you changed instantly to the likeness of a young man strangely garbed and ran swiftly to their camels and flogged them away faster than the men could follow. The man demanded his camels, and they were those you brought to the gates of the city. So they were yielded to him. Do you deny now

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that you are of the *djinn?"*

Tony swallowed, hard. A one-eyed man with a sword-slit nose? That was the man he had killed, back at the seashore! He'd been trying hard to forget the encounter, though if he'd ever had to pick out anybody on looks alone to be worked over with a scimitar, that man would have been the one. But—he could not have come and demanded the camels! It was not possible! Tony had left him an exceedingly messy object on the sand, and had chased his two companions with the scimitar as much in horror of his first dead man as out of any sort of anger. He swallowed again, very pale.

"You could not speak our human language." Ghail was tolerant, and scornful, and amused. "So I taught it to you. We hoped to make a bargain with you, because some of you *djinn* are willing to be traitors to your race. Perhaps you are ready to make such a bargain. But it is insolence for one of the *djinn* to think of purchasing a human slave!"

Even Tony's conscience was stunned, now.

"L-look!" he said desperately. "In my world, *djinns* are—only fables! What do they look like?"

"When the watcher on the city wall saw you on the desert, you had the form of a whirlwind. Why not? Is not that the way in which you travel?"

TONY swallowed yet again. His conscience had made a quick recovery. Now it began to say something piously satisfied about now look what a jam he'd gotten himself to, actually thinking romantic thoughts about an idiot girl who believed in imaginary creatures like *djinns* and *efreets!* But Tony shut it up. He saw implications of the theory of multiple worlds that he hadn't realized before. What is true in one world is not necessarily true in another. What is false in one world, also, is not invariably false in another. Actually, if there are enough worlds, anything must be true somewhere. Anything!

And he remembered—and flinched at remembering—his impression of a huge, vaporous, open-mouthed face which had been looking down at him in the small boat when he waked on the shore. He remembered the sand-devil, the whirlwind, which had looked like dark smoke in spite of the fact that it was whirling over white sand. It had kept pace with him as he went to meet the Bedouin and their attempt to kill him. It had hovered interestedly near during that encounter. And it had wavered hopefully after him all the way across the desert to this city.

He gulped audibly. The inference was crazy—but if this was a world in which *djinns* were real, then craziness was sense. And then something else occurred to him.

"How long after my arrival did the one-eyed man come to claim the camels?" he demanded.

The slave-girl shrugged. "One hour. No more. That was why we were sure."

"And the camels were stolen by the seashore."

"You stole them! They were stolen by the sea."

"I traveled some hours by camel," said Tony grimly. "He must have followed their footprints in the sand—if he knew where to demand them. So he traveled as far on foot as I did on camel-back—if he tells the truth! But it took me five hours to reach the city from the sea on camel-back. Yet he made the journey on foot in only one hour more. How fast does the one-eyed man walk? As fast as a camel, even trailing?"

The girl Ghail stared at him. Her face went blank. It was a five-hour journey from the sea to the city. She knew it as well as Tony. That was by camel. On foot it would take a man ten hours or better. If the one-eyed man had trailed the camels, he could not possibly have arrived so soon. Not possibly.

"A whirlwind followed me all the way," said Tony, swallowing. "And—I killed a one-eyed man with a slit nose as he and two companions tried to rob me. Some-

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ow, I think that the one-eyed man who ot the three camels sometimes doubles s a whirlwind."

His conscience was strickenly silent. But Ghail knitted her brows and stamped ier bare feet and snapped a number of Arabic words she had never taught Tony. They crackled. They sparked. They seemed to have blue fire around he edges.

"The misbegotten!" she cried furiously. "The accursed of Allah! From his own mouth came the proof that he lied! And we saw it not! *He* was the *djinn!* He has made mock of the wisdom of men! How he will laugh, and all his fellows!"

She turned upon Tony. "And you—you are as stupid as the *djinns!* Why did you never ask about your camels?" She paused suspiciously. "But—were they camels? Perhaps they also were *djinns!* Perhaps it is all a trick! You may be another *djinn!* This might be—"

Tony threw up his hands. "In my world," he said helplessly, "*djinns* are fables."

"Your world?" snapped the girl. "How many worlds did Allah make? And if *djinns* are fables, why is the throne of Barkut empty?"

"On the coins?" asked Tony as helplessly as before.

She stamped her foot once more. "On the coins and in the palace! What sort of fool are you? You say you are human? Will you drink of the *lasf* plant?"

She fairly blazed scorn at him; scorn and vexation and at least the beginning of bewilderment. Tony tried to placate her.

"If *lasf* is not something spelled backwards with added vitamins, and if other humans drink it, I have no objection at all!"

She jumped to her feet and hurried to the barred gateway of the courtyard adjoining his cell. She spoke imperiously through the bars. Even a slave-girl can be imperious to other slaves, on occasion. And there was always somebody passing that barred gateway, with full freedom to look in. Tony had chafed at the fact—and been reproached by his conscience for chafing—when Ghail first began her daily lessons in Arabic. Lately he had become resigned. But he still wished stubbornly that things were different.

She came back with a polished brass goblet containing a liquid. She tasted it carefully, as if its contents might be doubtful, and then offered it to Tony.

"This is *lasf*," she said sternly. "It is poisonous to the *djinns*. If you drink, it will be of your own will."

Tony drank it. From the expression on her face, it seemed to be an action of extraordinary importance. He was tempted to make a flourish, but made a face instead. It was not wholly bad. It had a faintly remniscent flavor, as of something he had drunk before. It tasted a little like some of the herb teas his maiden aunt had dosed him with as a child. From experience he knew that the flavor would last. He would keep tasting it all day, and it ought to be good for something or other, but he could not guess what.

He handed back the goblet.

"I wouldn't say," he remarked," that it would be a popular soft drink back home, but I have tasted some almost as bad."

V

THE girl Ghail stared at him in seeming stupefaction. Then, as he regarded her expectantly, she suddenly began to flush. The red came into her cheeks and spread to her temples, and then ran down her throat. He followed its further spread with interest. When it had reached her legs she abruptly ran to the gate and hammered on it, crying out fiercely. Soldiers with whiskers and flintlock muskets appeared instantly, as if they had been kept posted out of sight for an emergency which could only be created by Tony Gregg. They let her out, scowling at him.

He sat down and breathed deeply, star-

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ing at the stone wall of his dungeon-courtyard. She'd believed him a *djinn*, eh? *Djinns* were creatures of Arabian mythology. They were able to take any form, and sometimes were doomed to obey the commands of anybody possessing a talisman such as a magic ring or lamp. At other times they could scare the pants off of even a True Believer not so equipped. They kidnapped princesses, whom the heroes of the Arabian Nights unfailingly rescued, and they fought wars among themselves, and they were not quite the same as *efreets*, who were always repulsive, while *djinns* might take the form of very personable humans. They were also not quite so dreadful as *ghuls*—from which the English word "ghoul" is derived—who lived on human flesh.

There was a wooden bench against the wall, at which Tony stared abstractedly. He became aware that it was oscillating vaguely. It thumped this way, and that, and just as the oddity of its behavior really caught his attention, the bench fell over. It tumbled sidewise with a heavy "bump" to the hard-baked clay floor.

Tony looked startled. Then he got up and went over to the bench. At a moment when *djinns* were recently made plausible, erratic behavior of furniture suggesting ghosts was practically prosaic. He examined the overturned object. There was a minor quivering of the wood as he touched it. It felt almost alive.

He heaved it up, so completely offbase mentally that he acted in a perfectly normal manner. He was actually too dazed to do anything else. The quivering of the bench stopped. He saw a bug on the hard-baked clay—a beetle, lying on its back and wriggling its legs frantically. It was pressed solidly into the clay, as if the full weight of the bench had thrust it down without crushing it. It was a trivial matter. An absurd matter. It was insane to bother about a bug on the ground—

But as he looked down at the wriggling black thing, its outlines miste A little dustiness appeared in mid-a down by the floor. Then Tony Gregg hair stood up straight on end, so abrup ly that it seemed that each separate ha should have cracked like a whiplash. H backed away, goggling.

And a tiny whirlwind appeared, ar rose until it was his own height or ma be a little more, and then an amiable bi unintelligent female face appeared the top of it. The face was two fe wide from ear to ear. It was a bovin contentedly moronic face with no clai whatever to beauty. It beamed at hi and said:

"Sh-h-h-h-h!"

Tony said:

"Huh?"

"There is danger for me here," sai the female face, beaming. "I have hidde here for days. I was—" it giggled– "that beetle under the bench. Befor that I was a fly on the wall. My nam is Nasim. Please do not tell that I ar here!"

TONY gulped. He clenched his hand and stared at the swirl of dust on th courtyard floor. It tapered down prac tically to a point where he had seen th bug pressed in the clay, but at his ow shoulder-height it was almost a yar across, like an enlongated, unsubstantia top which swayed back and forth abov its point of support.

"You are—" Tony gulped "a—*djinn?*"

"I am a *djinnee*," said the beamin face, coyly.

Tony gulped again.

"Oh . . . ."

The face regarded him sentimentally It sighed gustily.

"Do I frighten you in this shape?" i asked, even more coyly than before "Would you like to see me in humar form?"

Tony made an inarticulate noise. The face atop the whirlwind giggled. The mist thickened. Substance seemed to flow upward into it from the ground. A human form appeared in increasing sub-

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stantiality in the mist. The round face shrank and appeared in more normal size and proportion on the materializing human figure. Tony's mouth dropped open. He abruptly ceased to disbelieve in the existence of *djinns*. He was prepared to concede also the existence of *efreets, ghuls,* leprechauns, ha'nts, Big Chief Bowlegs, the spirit control, and practically anything anybody cared to mention. Because from the small whirlwind a convincingly human female form had condensed—

The pink-skinned, rather pudgy, quite unclothed figure cast a look of arch coyness upon Tony.

"Do you prefer me as a human woman?" asked the figure, giggling. "I would like for you to like me . . . ."

Tony caught his breath with difficulty. "Why—er—yes, of course. But—just in case somebody looks in the gate, hadn't you better put some clothes on?"

The *djinnee* who called herself Nasim looked down at her human body and said placidly:

"Oh. I forgot."

Garments began to materialize. And then there was a clanking at the gate, and then a howl of fury, and a flint-lock musket boomed thunderously in the confined space of the courtyard. The pink-skinned, pugdy female form seemed to rush outward in all directions. There was a roaring of wind. A dark whirlwind, giggling excitedly, sped upward and fled away. Even in flight, and in the form of a whirlwind, it looked somehow rotund and it looked somehow sentimental.

Then Tony was almost trampled down by half-a-dozen soldiers with baggy trousers and slippers and flint-lock guns which banged and smoked futilely at the vanishing patch of smoke in the sky. And there was a fat man with a purple-dyed beard, and there was Ghail, the slave-girl, with a good deal more clothes on than before. She looked at Tony with a distinctly unpleasant expression on her face.

"Now," said Ghail ominously, "would you tell me the meaning of the *djinn,* hussy, without any clothes on, in the very palace of Barkut?"

Tony's conscience caught its breath, and began to express its highly unfavorable opinion of things in general, and of Tony in particular.

VI

TONY GREGG'S conscience as has been noted, was the creation of the worthy spinster aunt who raised him. Having no more normal outlet for the creative instinct, she had labored over Tony's conscience. And following a celebrated precedent, she made it in her own image. In consequence, Tony often had a rather bad time.

That night his conscience, which seemed almost to be pacing the floor in anguish beside his bed, gave him the works. Horrible! Horrible! said his conscience. Here it had spent the best part of his life trying to make him into a person who, in thirty or forty years of devotion, scrupulous attention to his duties, and a virtuous and proper life, would attain to the status of a brisk young executive. Tony's conscience conveniently ignored the fact that after thirty or forty years of virtue and scrupulosity, Tony would neither be young nor brisk. And what had Tony done? demanded his conscience bitterly. He had won more than eleven thousand dollars in the low and disreputable practise of betting on horse-races. But had he invested that windfall in gilt-edged securities? He had not. He'd come on a wild-goose chase across half the world, to arrive at this completely immoral and utterly preposterous place of Barkut! He had spent three weeks in jail! His conscience metaphorically wrung its hands. And now—now a slave-girl who showed her legs aroused his amorous fancy. Worse, a female *djinn* with no modesty whatever—

Tony yawned. He felt somewhat apprehensive about the *djinnee* who said her name was Nasim, but he was cer-

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tainly not allured. He was even almost grateful, because the slave-girl Ghail had been in the sort of rage a girl does not feel over the misdeeds of a man she cares nothing about. And Tony felt a very warm approval of Ghail. It was not only that she had nice legs. Oh, definitely not! He approved of many other things about her. And besides, she was a nice person. She treated him like an individual human being, and during all his life heretofore Tony had been surveyed as a possible date, or a possible husband if nothing better turned up, but rarely as a simple human being.

He turned over in bed. He was no longer in his cell, but in something like a bridal or royal suite in the palace. It was so huge that he felt a bit lonely. The ceiling of his bedroom was all of twenty feet tall, and arched, with those sculptured icicles he had seen in pictures of the Alhambra in Spain. The floor was of cool marble tiles, with rugs here and there. The bed itself was hardly more than a pallet upon a stand of black wood ornamented in what certainly looked like gold. The coverings were silk. There was a pitcher of some cooling drink by his elbow, and if he pulled a silken bell-cord a slave—male—would come in and pour it out for him.

His position in Barkut had changed remarkably during the day. At the moment of the excitement over Nasim, Ghail had brought a chamberlain with a purple-dyed beard to explain that his imprisonment had been all a mistake. He had been believed a *djinn,* clad in human form for subversive political activity within the city. Since he wasn't a *djinn* —and drinking the *lasf* proved without doubt that he was not—and since he had told the girl Ghail that when he talked to the rulers he would be high in favor and rich, the rulers were naturally anxious to know what he had to offer in exchange for favor and riches. Also—the slave-girl put this in a bit sullenly —if the king of the *djinns* of these parts had sent a *djinnee* at great risk into Barkut to beguile Tony, it was evident that the *djinn* also attached great importance to him. So the rulers of Barkut wanted also to know what that importance was.

Tony had been led to a great hall with zodiacal figures in brass laid flush in the black-marble floor. The throne of Barkut stood beneath its canopy against the far wall. It was empty. There were six ancient men seated on rugs before it, smoking water-pipes. They smoked and coughed and wheezed and looked unanimously crabbed and old and ineffective. But their red-rimmed eyes inspected the slave-girl before they turned to Tony, so he felt that there was some life somewhere in them yet.

They greeted him with fussy politeness and had him sit and then wheezingly asked him who he was and where he came from, and generally what the hell the shooting was about.

THE slave-girl Ghail intervened before he could answer. She explained that Tony came from a far country, and that he had crossed the farthest ocean on a great flying bird. Tony had told her as much, lacking an exact Arabic term for a transatlantic plane or even for a converted four-motored bomber. He had traveled farther, Ghail added, in a boat of steel with fire in its innards. This was a repetition of Tony's description of the somewhat decrepit steamer from Suez to Suakim. And these things, Ghail said firmly, she had believed to be lies from a more than usually stupid *djinn,* but since Tony was no *djinn* but a human, who was inexplicably sought after by the local *djinn* king, she believed them absolutely.

The six councilors smoked and coughed and made other elderly noises. Tony opened his mouth to speak, and again the slave-girl forestalled him.

In his home land, said Ghail truculently, Tony was of a rank second to none. This was her interpretation of his attempt to explain that nobody in America was of higher rank than even he was, as a citizen. He was a prince, Ghail elabor-

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ed, journeying in quest of adventure id to see the peoples of the earth—an ctivity considered highly appropriate in rinces. His people had so subdued the *jinn* that they, though only humans, ode in the air with ease and safety, id spake to each other privately though thousand miles apart, and traveled in ersonal vehicles with the power of forty nd fifty and a hundred horses, and were ightier in war than any other people nder the sun.

These statements also Tony had made the course of his language lessons. He ad thought Ghail impressed, then, and he was not an easy person to awe; and ow she repeated them parrot-like, with belligerent air, as if daring anybody o question them. In short, she said, Tony was a very dangerous person. On he side of Barkut he would be danger- us to the *djinn*. On the side of the *djinn* —and the king of the *djinn* had already ried to allure him by the charms of a *djinnee*—he would be dangerous to Bar- ut. Therefore he should either be se- ured as an ally of Barkut, or else ex- ecuted immediately before he could set ut to help the *djinn*.

Tony said feebly, "But—"

"Did you not tell me that you were in he greatest of all wars?" Ghail de- nanded. "In which millions of humans were killed? Did you not say that your ation ended the war by destroying cities nstantly, in flame hotter than the hot- est fire?"

Tony had unquestionably mentioned atomic bombs. He had also said that he was in the war. He had not mentioned that he spent it at a typewriter—be- cause, of course, Ghail would not know what a typewriter was.

"So you," said the slave-girl firmly, "will swear by the beard of the Prophet to lead the armies of Barkut to victory over the *djinn*—or else—"

ULTIMATELY he swore, gloomily and at length, on a book with a binding of marvelously ornamented richness. It was a Koran, and he had never read it and did not believe its contents. More, he did not know what sort of beard the Prophet had affected, so it could not be said that there was a meeting of minds, and possibly the contract was not really valid. But he felt an obligation, never- theless.

Late that night, unable to sleep, it recurred. The ancient men of the Council of Regents of Barkut had given him their confidence out of the direness of their need. The slave-girl Ghail counted on him, because there was no one else to turn to. The danger to Barkut from the *djinn*, he gathered, was extreme. The plant *lasf* was a partial protection against the *djinn*, but bullets merely stung them, and *lasf* grew constantly more difficult to come by, and the *djinn* grew bolder and bolder as the humans in Barkut ran into the technological dif- ficulties inherent in a shortage of *lasf*. Four years ago, the king of the local *djinn* had, in person, kidnapped the

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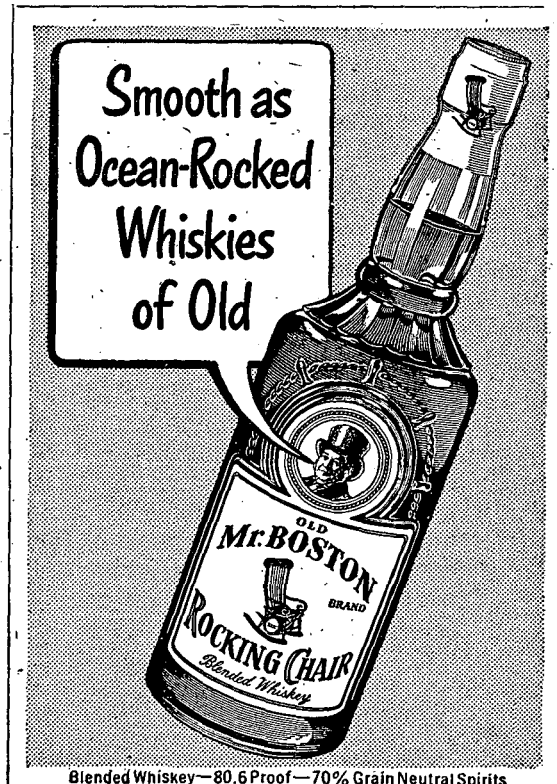

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authentic queen of Barkut and now held her prisoner. Hence the empty throne and the Council of Regents. For some reason not clear to Tony, the ruler of Barkut could not actually be injured by a *djinn*, though her subjects were not so fortunate. Therefore the Queen's only sufferings were imprisonment and the ardent courtship of the *djinn* kind. Still . . . .

Lying wakeful in bed in the royal suite of the palace, Tony surveyed this statement of the situation with distrust. It sounded naive and improbable, like something out of the Arabian Nights. It was. Like all the events stemming from his purchase of a ten-dirhim piece in an antique-shop on West 45th Street, New York, it was so preposterous that he pinched himself for assurance that his present surroundings were real.

They were. The pinch hurt like the devil. He rubbed it, scowling. Then he heard a thud on the windowsill of his bedroom. He got out of bed, suspicious. He went to the window. Nothing. It looked out upon a small garden, there to please the occupants of this suite. There were grass and shrubbery and small trees and a fountain playing in the starlight. It smelled inviting. Beyond lay the palace, and beyond that the city, and beyond that the oasis and the desert. And somewhere—somewhere unguessable—lay the dominions and the stronghold of the *djinns* beyond the desert.

His conscience wrung its hands. In the fix he was in, to be thinking about *djinns* and captive queens and such lunatic items! How about those fine plans for an import-export business between Barkut and New York? What had he learned about the commercial products of Barkut? What was the possible market for American goods? If he went, with no more than he now knew, to an established firm in New York to get them to take up the matter, what information could he give them that would justify them in offering him an executive position? Why, if he'd only confined his attention to proper subjects like exports and imports instead of trying to rous the romantic interest of a long-legge slave-girl, nobody would ever hav thought of asking him to lead an army–

Rubbing his leg where it hurt, h gazed out into the garden and rudel thrust his conscience aside. That garde looked romantic in the starlight. H wouldn't mind being out there right no with Ghail . . . .

Something stirred on the windowsil almost beside his hand. He started, an in starting dislodged one of the sof silken cushions that were everywher about this place. It fell to the floor. H saw a tiny dark shape on the sill, like a frog. He groped for a shoe to swat i with, and it jumped smartly into th room. It *was* a frog. He could tell by the way it jumped . . . but it landed or the cushion with a whacking, smacking "thud" such as no frog should make. It sounded like a couple of hundred pounds of steel mashing a pillow flat and banging against the floor beneath. The pillow, in fact, burst under the impact. Stray particles of stuffing flew here and there. The frog disappeared within. From the interior of the burst cushion came explosive swearing in a deep bass voice.

Then the split silken covering inflated and burst anew, and a swirling luminous mist congealed into a solid shape, and Tony found himself staring at an essentially human form. It had the most musclebound arms and shoulders he had ever seen, however, and a chest like a wine cask, and a wrestler's knotty legs. Its head and face were of normal size; but it took no effort whatever to realize that the features were those of a *djinn*. The slanting, feral eyes, the white tusks projecting slightly from between the lips, the pointed ears—it was a *djinn*, all right, and a *djinn* in a terrible temper.

"Mortal!" it roared. "You are that strange prince who came across the desert!"

Tony swallowed.

The creature revealed additional inches of tusk.

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"You are that creature, that mere human, who ensnared the love of Nasim, the jewel among *djinnees!*" It pounded its chest, which resounded like a tympani. "Know, mortal, that I am Es-Souk, her betrothed! I have come to tear you limb from limb!"

TONY'S conscience said acidly that it had told him so. He was not aware of any other mental process. He simply stared, open-mouthed. And the *djinn* leaped on him with incredible agility.

Sinewy, irresistable powerful hands seized his throat. They tightened, and then relaxed as the *djinn* said gloatingly:

"You shall die slowly!"

Then the hands tightened again, bit by bit.

Tony had not lately taken any systematic exercise greater than that of punching buttons in an automat restaurant. It was hardly adequate preparation for a knock-down, drag-out with a *djinn.* He clawed at the strangling hands with complete futility. Then a strange calmness came to him. Perhaps it was resignation. Possibly it was a lurking unbelief in the reality of his experiences, somewhere in the back of his mind. But being strangled, even if it were illusion, was extremely uncomfortable. He remembered a part of the basic combat training he had received before being assigned to sit at a typewriter for the glory of his country's flag. An axiom of that training was that nobody can strangle you if you only keep your head. All you have to do—

Tony did it. Because being strangled is painful.

He reached up with both hands, and in each hand took one—just one—of the *djinn's* sinewy fingers. One complete human hand is stronger than the single finger of even a *djinn.* Tony peeled the single fingers ruthlessly backward. Something snapped.

The *djinn* howled and hooted like an ambulance. Tony hastily repeated the process. Something else cracked. The *djinn* howled louder, and let go. There were dim shoutings and rushings in the corridors of the palace. But Tony remained alone, gasping for breath, in the high-ceilinged room with this creature who said he was Es-Souk the betrothed of Nasim. By now Tony remembered Nasim only as a beaming misty face and a pudgy human figure which had seemed exclusively pink skin. Es-Souk swelled to the size of an elephant, beating his breast and hollering.

Tony coughed. His throat hurt. He coughed again, rackingly.

The monstrous, and now unhuman, figure sneezed. The blast of air practically knocked Tony off his feet. Then Es-Souk uttered cries which were suddenly bellowings of terror. He sneezed again, and the silken bed-sheets flapped crazily to the far corners of the room.

Then the *djinn's* figure melted swiftly into a dark whirlwind which poured through the window. There were poundings on the door, but Tony paid no attention to them. He reeled to the window and stared out.

A shape fled in panic among the stars. It was a whirlwind of dark smokiness, but the stars were very bright. It showed. The whirlwind which was the *djinn* Es-Souk fled in mortal terror—or perhaps immortal terror—from the neighborhood of the palace of Barkut. And as it fled, it paused and underwent a truly terrific convulsion. Lightnings flashed in it. Thunder roared in it. The whole sky and the countryside were lighted by the flashings.

When a whirlwind sneezes, the results are impressive.

VII

TONY was wakened by the firing of cannon. His heart sank. An attack of some sort upon the city of Barkut? His conscience expressed bitter satisfaction at the possible impending consequences of his misdeeds, all done against his conscience's advice. But Tony listened to the cannon-shots. They were fired at

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regular intervals. Which might mean a salute, or might mean something of a ceremonial nature, but certainly didn't mean guns being aimed and fired as fast as they bore on their targets.

He got out of bed and dressed. He had folded his trousers carefully and put them under the mattress of his bed. The result would not have satisfied him in New York, but here he had the nearest approach to a crease in his pants he'd had since his arrival. He put them on. He felt better. He began to tuck in his shirt-tails.

The door opened. His breakfast, evidently. Two dark-skinned slaves carried a gigantic silver platter on which was piled the better part of a roasted sheep. Fruit. Coffee. Bread, which was in thin, flexible, doughy sheets more suited for the wrapping of packages than the making of breakfast toast. With the two male slaves came two slave-girls in garments quite appropriate for indoors in a hot climate. They were gauzy and not extensive. One of the girls carried some kind of musical instrument. They smiled warmly upon Tony as he finished tucking in his shirt.

"Your breakfast, Lord," said one of them brightly. "The city rejoices in your victory."

"Victory?" said Tony. "What victory?"

"The defeat, Lord," said the prettier of the two slave-girls," of the *djinn* who was sent to slay you who are the hope of Barkut. The cannons fire and the people dance in the streets. There will be decorations and fireworks."

Tony's conscience was skeptical. He shared its view. But the cannon boomed, nevertheless. Tony's neck was sore this morning, and he had cold chills down his back at odd moments. Breaking the *djinn's* fingers had been a sound Army trick, but this Es-Souk had immediately afterward swelled to the size of at least a hippopotamus, and as soon as he stopped roaring he'd have tackled Tony again, and then there'd have been nothing but a blot left of Tony. Tony still didn't know what had made Es-Souk sneeze or flee in such palpable bellowing terror. Tony's conscience said, with something of the bite of vitriol, that the *djinn* had doubtless sneezed from an incipient cold, and that these two slave-girls weren't any too well protected against draughts, either.

He regarded them interestedly as the great silver platter came to rest on folding legs, convenient to his bedside. The two male slaves bowed deeply and departed. The booming of cannon continued. The two girls stayed.

"Hm . . ." said Tony. "You two—"

"We serve you, Lord," said the girl with the musical instrument. She seemed quite happy about it. "I play and Esir dances, or she plays and I dance, and both of us carve your meat and pour your sherbet and serve you in all ways."

Tony regarded them again. Slave-girls. Unveiled. Very sketchily attired. Very pretty. A charming idea of hospitality. Ghail had nicer legs, but—

His conscience snarled at him.

"So the cannon fire because of my victory!" he observed, reaching out for coffee.

One of them passed it to him, reverently.

"Aye, Lord," she said brightly. "Never before in the history of Barkut has a man defeated a *djinn* in single combat. Were they not so stupid, we had been their subjects long ago."

He drank the coffee. So nobody before had ever defeated a *djinn* in single combat? In that case, maybe some sort of celebration was in order. But he gloomily wished he knew how he'd done it. He scowled.

"You seem sad, Lord," said the one called Esir, anxiously. "Esim has made a song of your victory. Would you that she sing to cheer you?"

Tony grunted. His conscience observed warningly that he did not know anything about the local domestic habits. Perhaps, despite the veils and swathing robes women wore in the streets, it was an old Arabic custom to provide strictly

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musical entertainment with breakfast in a guest's bedroom.

"You two are slaves?" he asked, as one of them anticipated his reach for an orange and swiftly halved it for him and handed it to him with a tiny golden spoon for him to eat it with.

"Aye, Lord. Your slaves," said the two in unison, beaming.

Tony strangled on his first spoonful of orange pulp. They pounded his back anxiously. He coughed and blinked at them.

"You mean—"

"You came to Barkut without attendant, Lord," said Esir, happily, "and it was not fitting. So the Council gave us to you, with horses and other slaves, that you might be suitably served. And all of us, your slaves, wished to kneel to you immediately, but Ghail the slave-girl said that you had told her you did not wish to be disturbed last night, and therefore we only waited your summons—which did not come."

TONY absorbed the statement. It required considerable absorbing. He opened his mouth, and they hung upon his impending words, and he closed it without saying anything. So Ghail had kept him from having these two girls to dance and sing for him last night, eh? His conscience said something half-hearted about Ghail doubtless having his best interests at heart, but it had said too much in the past about her nonchalantly displayed bare legs. He did not heed it.

"Tonight," said Tony with decision, "thngs will be different."

They gave him the brightest and most joyous of smiles.

"And may we watch, Lord," said Esim hopefully, "when you slay the other *djinns* who will doubtless be sent to murder you tonight?"

Tony choked again. That was something he had been trying not to think about. The people of Barkut were, apparently, rather casual about *djinns* in spite of the long-continued war and the captivity of their official ruler. On the two occasions when *djinns* had turned up to Tony's knowledge, the people had not run away, but had come howling with rage to attack them. Flint-lock muskets had bellowed after the *djinnee* Nasim as she fled in the form of a whirlwind. Palace guards had been spoiling for a fight and were actually breaking down the door of Tony's apartment when he opened it for them after Es-Souk's departure. These people would put up a battle, and were not averse to it. But still they said that no one man had ever before conquered a *djinn* in single combat.

It was something that needed to be looked into. And then Tony had a idea. Rather strangely, he had altogether failed to use his ten-dirhim piece for guidance since his arrival in the city of Barkut itself. The reason was simply that he hadn't needed it to decide anything. He'd been quite content with things as they were. Even imprisonment in the dungeon-and-courtyard had not been bad. He'd been busy learning Arabic, with Ghail around to look at appreciatively—

But now the *djinns* were after his neck. Now he needed to know what to do.

He finished his breakfast and stood up. The two girls brought him a golden basin and water to wash his hands. They watched his every movement with a breathless absorption which was almost childlike and was certainly flattering. Dismissing them, he patted one on her bare shoulder. She made a little movement as if cuddling against his hand while she smiled at him. He patted the other—

They went out the door, smiling worshipfully back at him. He found himself whistling as he dug in his pocket for the ten-dirhim piece. He regarded it affectionately. When he was a brisk young executive with a residence in Barkut suitably staffed with male and female slaves, it would all be due to this coin! And now this coin would give him

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some needed advice.

He flipped it. He flipped it again. And again. And again.

HALF an hour later, when Ghail came into his apartment—and he noted disapprovingly that she was wearing more clothes than ever—he was sunk in abysmal gloom. The ten-dirhim piece was no longer informative. It turned up heads and tails completely at random. It contradicted itself. It had no longer any special quality at all. It was at home. It was in its own world. The attraction; the gravitation; the singular force which prevented the indiscriminate mixing-up of objects of different worlds by causing coincidences which kept them at home—that force was gone. Because the coin was back where it belonged and was no longer endowed with any property urging its return.

Ghail regarded Tony with an enigmatic expression.

"Greeting, Lord," she said in a tone which had all the earmarks of suitable slave-girl humility, but somehow was not humble at all, "there is news of great moment."

Tony felt inclined to groan. Among other things, he foresaw that he would be in for a bad time with his conscience presently.

"What is the news?" he asked drearily.

"The King of the *Djinn* has sent an embassy," Ghail told him. "He offers greetings to the prince from beyond the farthest set. He admires your prowess and desires to look upon the champion who defeated Es-Souk in single combat. He has punished Es-Souk for attempting to slay a human in a merely private quarrel. He offers a truce, safe-conduct, and an escort of his private guard."

Tony's conscience said indignantly that when an important message like this was at hand, Tony should be ashamed to be looking at Ghail and mooning about how much better-looking she was in less costume.

"What should I do?" asked Tony. "As I recall it, I pledged myself to destroy him, the other day. Yesterday, in fact. Do I tell him I'm in conference?"

Ghail shook her head frigidly.

"You should accept," she told him with no cordiality at all. "If you refused, he would think you were afraid."

"To be honest about it," said Tony, "I am. Have you any idea how I chased that *djinn* away last night?"

She looked at him in amazement.

"I haven't either," said Tony. "He was strangling me, so I broke a couple of his fingers and he let go, howling. Then he swelled up to the size of a gigantosaurus, bellowing, while I coughed my head off. He was just about to come for me again when he started to sneeze, and he went into a panic and flew out the window like his tail was on fire. I haven't the least idea why."

The slave-girl looked at him strangely.

"He sneezed? But *lasf* sometimes causes that! Not always, but sometimes. Had you *lasf?*"

"Not unless it was on my breath—which isn't unlikely," Tony said gloomily. "It's foul stuff and the aroma lingers on. I had a drink of it yesterday. You gave it to me."

"*Lasf* is poisonous to the *djinn* but not to human beings," said Ghail with some reserve. "We anoint our weapons and bullets with it before we go out to fight the *djinns*. It is very poisonous to them. They run away. Sometimes they sneeze. But *lasf* is very rare. The *djinn* pay the Bedouin of the desert to uproot and destroy it wherever they find it."

"Like DDT," said Tony morbidly, "with bugs hiring rabbits to sabotage the whole business." He had to use English words where he did not know the Arabic equivalents. She listened, uncomprehending. "Never mind. If you don't know how I did it, nobody knows, so that's that. So—I have to visit this *djinn* king, eh? If it's under safe-conduct, I suppose I'm safe from further strangling until I get back?"

"Oh, yes," said Ghail. "You and your attendants are safe until you return. Of

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course you will be offered bribes to betray us, and persuasion, and he may try to frighten you, and—" her voice grew suddenly angry— "he will have his *djinnees* try to beguile you. He does not want you to lead our armies against him."

"I'll try to resist the bribes and the beguilings, too," said Tony. Then he shuddered. "If what I had yesterday was a fair sample . . . Tell me, where do I get this reputation as a general?"

Ghail said coldly:

"I told the council about the war you were in. Also, that *djinnee* in the courtyard may have been listening for days. One way or another, it would get back, to the *djinns*."

VIII

TONY had been standing. Now he sat down. He looked at Ghail. He said, changing the subject:

"What's the matter, Ghail? You act as if I had bleeding gums or something equally repulsive. When you thought I was a *djinn* you didn't act this way."

Ghail said:

"There's nothing the matter." Then she added pointedly, "Did you enjoy your breakfast this morning?"

"That roasted sheep wasn't necessary," admitted Tony. "The coffee and fruit would have been enough. Did you arrange it?"

"It was thought," said Ghail coldly, "that since I had talked to you often I might know your likes and dislikes."

"Hm. . . ." said Tony. "You picked out those slaves—the two girls who were part of the present made by the Council?"

Her lips tensed. "I did. I hope they please you."

"It evidently didn't occur to you," said Tony in gentle reproach, "that you could have included yourself in the gift. That is the only criticism I could offer."

She stamped her foot.

"I am the personal property of the Queen!" she snapped. "The Queen is a prisoner of the *djinns*. I cannot be bought or given save of the queen!"

"It would be nice," Tony submitted, "if you could be persuaded."

She turned her back on him and started for the door. Tony said:

"By the way—when do I start for the *djinn* king's court? And you said the safe-conduct includes my attendants. Do I tell Esir and Esim to pack up for a trip?"

"You do not!" Ghail said shortly. "You will have but one attendant. You will start before nightfall. The *djinn* will provide mounts and accomodation for you and one other only!"

"I suppose—"

"You will go," Ghail said shortly, "because the *djinn* king invited you. I go as your pretended slave, but actually to take necessities to our captive Queen."

Tony looked at her. He raised his eyebrows.

"The journey," said Ghail haughtily, "will be made on the camels of the *djinns*, which are actually *djinns* in the form of camels. They travel like the wind. What would be four days' journey by human travel will be accomplished in no more than three hours."

"I was sure," said Tony in some regret, "that somehow you would manage to make it unsatisfactory. All right! Thank you."

HE WATCHED gloomily as she went out the door. Life, he reflected, had been a great deal more simple when he was a prisoner in a dungeon with a courtyard, instead of a general of armies he hadn't seen yet and a prince who had to make journeys to the courts of nonhuman entities he hadn't believed in before yesterday morning. At least, while he was a prisoner, Ghail had been around a lot, in a costume of limited area, and she'd seemed interested in him, if scornful. Now she seemed scornful of him and not interested. She rather resembled his conscience.

His conscience said sternly that though an untutored slave-girl, reared

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in a highly unfavorable atmosphere, she at least showed a devotion to duty and a sense of moral values which Tony was not displaying. Only Heaven knew, said Tony's conscience, what enormities he might commit at any time, now that he had ceased to heed his proper mentor—it was fortunate that this poor slave-girl had a sense of duty!

To this Tony replied that Ghail's sense of duty had led her to pick out two very attractive slave-girls as presents for him, and since he was going off somewhere and didn't know when he'd be back, he might as well call them in and have some music while he waited.

He stood up to pull the bell-cord.

Then he saw a stirring down at floor-level out of the corner of his eye. He whirled with something like a gasp. After the affair of the dungeon courtyard and the windowsill last night, he was becoming jumpy when bugs and frogs and other small objects moved in his neighborhood.

Two of the marble tiles of the floor were rising where they joined, as if something swelled beneath them. Tony stared, momentarily paralyzed. A green shoot appeared and grew. Leaves appeared at its tip as he watched. Branches spread out, and more leaves, and then a bud. The bud swelled. It opened into an enormous lush blossom of a violent magenta hue. And then the flower rearranged itself. It became a miniature head—and there was the beaming, sentimental face of Nasim the *djinnee,* wearing her explicitly minus-I-Q expression of amiability.

"Sh-h-h-h!" said the face in the flower, coyly.

Tony gulped. "I'm sh-sh-h-h-shed," he said. "What's up?"

"I'm sorry about Es-Souk," said the *djinnee,* beaming. "He's so jealous! He can't help it, poor thing! The king has put him in jail and it serves him right!"

Tony said:

"Oh."

"I felt that I had to tell you I was sorry," said the *djinnee,* almost simpering. "You're not angry with me?"

"Oh, no," said Tony. "It wasn't your fault."

"That's so good of you!" said Nasim. She regarded him with adoring, cowlike eyes from the flower-bush. "I've been hiding in a crack as a little moth's egg, waiting to tell you how sorry I am. But there's been somebody around all the time."

"Yes," said Tony. "There has been."

"Would you like me to take the form of a human woman?" asked Nasim hopefully—and giggling— "For a while?"

"You'd better wear some clo—" began Tony in apprehension. Then he said desperately, "Better not. Somebody might come in."

Nasim beamed. "All right. But you're going to our king's court. I'll see you there! I'll be around!"

"I'm sure you will be," said Tony dismally.

"I'm watching over you," said Nasim beatifically. "Since I heard about what Es-Souk tried to do on my account, I made up my mind to watch over you night and day. And I will! Night and day!"

Tony stared at her, appalled. There was a small noise outside the door. Nasim said sentimentally:

"I hate to go like this, but somebody's coming." She beamed. "I'll be a little grease-spot on the floor. Mind, now," she added archly, "Don't step on me!"

The flower and blossom and all the leaves and branches seemed to contract smoothly. Suddenly they were not. The marble floor-tiles fell together with a clink.

A delicate tapping on the door. Esir and Esim poked their heads around the door-frame. Their faces were hopeful, and at the same time distressed.

"Lord!" said Esir plaintively. "We hear that you go on a journey! Do we go too?"

Tony sighed.

"I'm afraid not," he admitted. "Affairs of state, and all that. I'm taking only one attendant, and I've not choice

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of that one."

"But Lord," protested Esim. "We have just been given to you, and we do not even know if we please you or not!"

They came into the room. They were young and shapely. They pleased him very much. They were openly eager experimental evidence of this fact, and looked at him imploringly.

"I like you both very much."said Tony. "In fact—" He thought back along a lifetime in New York, spent on subways and in automats and over double-entry ledgers, with only one interlude pounding a typewriter in an army camp. "In fact, I think I could be perfectly happy here in Barkut but for one thing."

They said anxiously;

"Lord, what is it that keeps you from happiness?"

Tony sighed deeply. He said in deepest gloom:

"Dammit, there's no privacy!"

IX

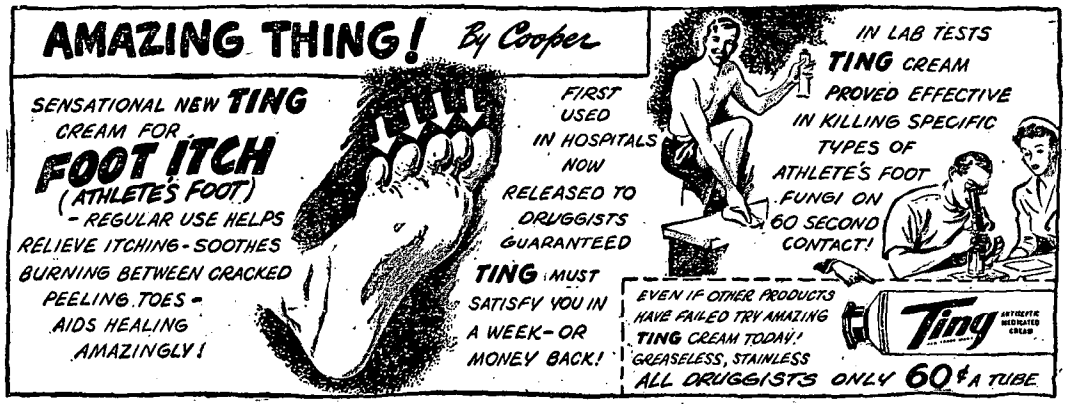
THE *djinn* camel was twenty feet tall, and it ambled through the night over the desert with monstrous strides. There were bright stars overhead, and a low-hung moon to cast long shadows; there was a camel-guard of *djinns* riding other *djinn* camels on every hand. Altogether the picture was one of barbaric magnificence. Wind swept past the contrivance which did duty as a cabin on the huge ship of the desert. The contrivance reminded Tony forcibly of the inside of an Austin coupe, minus the instrument-board. But it did not ride so smoothly. The size of the camel did not change the nature of its gait, and it would not be wise to burp while the animal was in motion.

Tony looked out a window at their escort. Ten-foot *djinns* on twenty-foot camels. Bearded, moustachioed, tusked and pointed-eared monstrosities, with spears as tall as their camels, with monstrous scimitars as tall as Tony himself, with garments of silk and velvet and garnished with gigantic precious stones which gleamed even in the moonlight. A hundred of them, no less, keeping close formation about the beast on which Tony and Ghail the slave-girl rode.

In the moonlight, the *djinn* guard looked bored. It probably was boring, Tony reflected abstractedly, to be plodding at a mere forty miles an hour over endless sand, on the back of an acquaintance metamorphosized into a camel who would presently expect you to change places with him. This kind of exchange was taking place with some regularity. At least, camels and their riders droped out of formation and fell behind, and presently new camels and new riders came hurrying up from the rear to resume the place that had been vacated.

A lurching of the camel threw Ghail against him. She was veiled, now, and swatched in all the drapery of a woman dressed for travel or the street. She was

[*Turn page*]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singularly remote, too. Back at Barkut's city gate, she had climbed the ladder to the camel-cabin—at the height of a storey window—with an air of extreme aloofness, ignoring the demoniac *djinn* guardsmen waiting about. Tony had been unable to match her dignity as he scrambled up and joined her in the small, close coupe. The guard had formed up about them and they had gone sweeping away into the desert darkness, leaving the city's faint and twinkling lights behind. Ghail had spoken no word then, and she did not speak now. The silence was burdensome. A moment later the camel lurched again. Tony was thrown almost into her lap.

"I'm sorry," he said politely. "Bad road, this."

"There is no road," said Ghail composedly. "We have reached the foothills of the mountains, and the *djinn* are not used to walking. They wished to carry us in whirlwinds, but in your name I declined."

"I suppose," agreed Tony, "we'd have gotten dizzy."

He fell silent again. Another monstrous lurch, and Ghail landed almost exactly on his knee. He helped her back into her own place again and said;

"Look here! We'd better have some system about this! I know you disapprove of me thoroughly, but in default of safety-belts I'd better put my arm around you."

The camel seemed to stumble and Tony grabbed. They were suddenly upright again, and his arm was firmly around her and she made no protest.

"I don't disapprove of you especially," she said with some primness, "but all men are alike."

"The observation is remarkably original," he told her. "I suppose you are also prepared to tell me that I do not respect you?"

She turned her head. Her lips were close to his ear.

She whispered fiercely:

"*The camel is* a djinn! *It's listening!*"

"True," said Tony. "Damn! No privacy even here!"

HE STARED gloomily out at the moonlit foothills which now had arisen from the desert and seemed to lead on through deeply-shadowed moonlight toward mountains which also were alternately shadowed and shining ahead. He suddenly felt a soft hand groping for his. It pressed his fingers meaningfully. He squeezed back, encouraged beyond expectation. But the hand was snatched away.

Soft warm breath on his neck. A furious whisper in his ear;

"*I wanted to tell you something! Here is* lasf. *In tiny glass phials you can break in case of need. Then no* djinn *will come near you. It is for your protection!*"

Tony put out his hand again. One very small smooth glass object, the size of his thumb or smaller. He put it away. He reached again. Another. A third. He put them in separate pockets to avoid the danger of breaking them against each other. He put his lips to her ear.

"*Thanks. Have you some for yourself?*"

"*Of course! And some for the Queen, to protect her when you lead our armies to her rescue—when you are ready to destroy the* djinn. *Now you had better talk, since you have begun!*"

He leaned back, as well as he could considering the violent and erratic movements of the *djinn* camel's gait. He suddenly began to feel better. After all, qualified privacy on a *djinn's* back might have its points.

"Hm. . . ." he said aloud. "In my country the *djinn* have been subdued so long—they're kept on reservations—that humans don't bother about them any more. I've even forgotten the stuff one learns about them in first grade at school. It seems extraordinary to me that they can change their size so much. Their shape, yes. In my country even human women can do remarkable things to their shapes with girdles and falsies.

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You'd hardly believe! And of course they change their coloring. But size, absolute size, no. . . ."

Ghail stirred uneasily. But she spoke as primly as before.

"*Djinns* are elastic," she said. "With the same amount of substance they can be as large as a whirlwind. Or as small as a grain of sand, though no one could possibly pick them up— for always they weigh the same."

"You mean," asked Tony, with interest, "that a *djinn* in the shape of a bug or—hm—a moth's egg, weighs as much as when he or she is a camel and that sort of thing?"

Ghail caught hold of his right hand, which had wandered, and held it firmly.

"That is it, yes," she said shortly.

"Then that," said Tony blithely, "explains why the bench in the courtyard turned over. A *djinn* beetle was climbing on it. It explains a lot of things."

Ghail caught hold of his left hand and held it savagely. She ground her teeth.

"Thanks," said Tony. "Since we don't get thrown around so much this ride is much more fun, isn't it?"

Ghail turned her head and whispered in his ear, strangling with fury:

"*As soon as you have destroyed the* djinn *I am going to kill you!*"

TONY beamed in the darkness inside the small Austin-sized cabin on top of the lurching camel. Ghail held his hands, muttering fiercely. His arm was about her shoulders. The combination made the bumping and swaying and unholy undulations of the beast not at all annoying—to Tony.

"There's another thing I'd like to ask about," he said cheerfully. "When you were teaching me to speak your language, you wore a very sensible hot-weather costume. I mean, there wasn't too much of it. About like the bathing-suits girls wear back at home. And you very properly didn't seem embarrassed. But that was only when you thought I was a djinn. As soon as you found out I wasn't, you got all bothered. In fact, you blushed in the most unlikely places. . . . Why?"

She said through clenched teeth;

"*Djinns* are not human. I would not be embarrassed before a cat, either. Or a slave. But a man, yes!"

"Yet Esir and Esim—"

"They would have been embarrassed too, before they were given to you and were your slaves." Her voice quivered with fury. "I am dressed as I am because I travel with you."

Then she hissed into his ear;

"*When this is over I will see that you are boiled in oil! You will be fed to dogs! You will be torn into little pieces—*"

Tony's ear tingled pleasantly. He continued to beam in the darkness as the twenty-foot camel which was actually a *djinn* went swaying and lurching through the night.

It had been two hours' journey across the desert proper—a caravan might make forty miles a day if pressed, but this camel made that much in an hour —and it was another hour before the *djinn* king's court appeared to be nearing. The evidence of approach was fairly obvious. The troop of *djinn* guards approached a narrow pass between precipitous cliffs. It was guarded by two colossal shapes with flaming eyes. They stood forty feet high, in gleaming armor, and they carried battle-axes whose blades were more than a man-height wide, with shafts the size of palm-trees. They challenged in voices like thunder. The cavalcade halted. A guttural voice gave a countersign. The gigantic guards drew back. Tony watched with interest.

"Very impressive," he said judicially. "But actually, you tell me, these are simply *djinn* who have extended themselves—decompressed themselves, you might say—to reach those rather excessive dimensions. At that size they're not much more substantial than so much fog, are they? How can they handle such axes?"

"The axes," said Ghail shortly, "are a part of themselves. *Djinns* can take

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the appearance of a chest of coins or jewels, which seem like many objects. But to pull away one coin or jewel would be to pull away a part of the *djinn*. You could not. The axes are a part of their form. So are their garments and the ornaments they wear."

"Hm," said Tony, "I see."

THE cavalcade went on. The pass through the mountains grew more narrow and more straight. The cliffs above it grew steeper until the giant camels with their giant riders rode in utter darkness with only a ribbon of star-studded sky above them. Then the pass turned, and widened a little and narrowed again. The entrance to the farther and still narrower part of the pass was completely closed by something only bright starlight enabled Tony to believe he saw. It was the head of a dragon with closed eyes, seemingly dozing. It completely filled the pass. Great nostrils the size of subway-tunnels gave out leisurely puffs of smoke the size of subway-trains.

The caravan moved up to it and halted. The leader of the guard bellowed. The great eyes of the dragon's head opened. Each was as large—so Tony estimated—as one of Macy's plateglass windows. They looked balefully down at the *djinn* trooper.

He bellowed again. The nostrils puffed. Then the gigantic mouth opened. It looked rather like the raising of a drawbridge for the passage of a tow of coal-barges. It gaped wide. Flames played luridly, far down the exposed throat.

The caravan moved smartly into the wide-held jaws. It went comfortably down into the flame-lined maw—

And suddenly the low-hanging moon shone brightly on a wide valley with the palace of the *djinn* king in the distance. It was huge. It was ablaze with lights. And the passage-way to it was lined with giants whose feet, only, were visible. Legs thicker than the thickest tree-trunks rose overhead. Bellies protruded rather like fleshy strato-cumili, hundreds of feet above the camels of the caravan. The heads of the giants were invisible. Tony felt very small. To reassure himself he said amiably to Ghail:

"It must be a fairly calm night. If not, expanded as they are, even a light breeze would make these giants wabble all over the place like captive balloons."

Ghail put Tony's right hand firmly in front of him. She released it. She took his left arm and removed it firmly from her shoulders.

"We are almost there," she said shortly. "You will ask that I be taken to our Queen in her prison, that she may have the solace of a human woman to weep with her in her captivity."

There was sudden uneasiness, even anxiety, in her voice. In fact, it wavered a little. And Tony knew why she was frightened. She traveled as his slave. Here, among the *djinn*—

"I'll do that," he told her almost remorsefully. "I've been pretty much of a beast, haven't I? But I'll see that you're toddled off to your Queen while I see the king and listen to his offers of bribes."

She adjusted her veil and swathing robes.

"You will not see him tonight!" she said bitterly. "You will be shown to your apartment, and there he will send refreshments and entertainment to beguile you so that you will wish alliance with him instead of Barkut! There will be wine, and *djinnees* in the form of women, and everything that is disreputable to appeal to a man!"

Tony managed to look shocked. Actually, it sounded interesting.

"You mean that *djinns* are as immoral as all that?"

"Of course!" she said more bitterly still. "They are stupid! They are unbelievably stupid! So of couse they are immoral! And if they were not stupid, and probably if they were not immoral, we humans would have no chance against them at all! And it is because men are so stupid that they are so immoral, and —and—"

Suddenly, she was crying. And Tony

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patted her shoulder comfortingly, and took aside her veil and wiped her eyes. And as suddenly she was not crying at all, but looking at him very strangely.

"What—what do you think of me now?" she asked in a small voice.

"My dear," said Tony with a sigh, "I think you are probably the most intelligent girl I ever met in my life."

The caravan halted before the intricately sculptured gateway of the *djinn* king's palace, and there was no more time for even semi-private conversation.

Tony descended from the camel in a very stately fashion. To the gorgeously-robed *djinn* chamberlain who greeted him in the king's name, he relayed Ghail's request—that she be allowed to share the captivity of the Queen of Barkut during his visit. Shortly, Ghail went away behind a *djinnee* who was at the moment some twelve feet tall, of a greenish complexion, and wearing a necklace of diamonds each one of which was a good deal larger than a baseball. Tony chatted amiably with the chamberlain who greeted him as a prince and a general of Barkut.

"A most comfortable journey!" said Tony, as a procession formed up to escort him to his quarters. "Your camels, in particular, arouse my admiration!"

He swaggered in exactly the manner of the solitary general he had come in contact with in the greatest war of the human race.

"Admirable!" he repeated in that general's very tones. "The one who carried me is a very pearl among camels!"

The camel he had ridden turned its head. It looked at him sentimentally. It sighed gustily. It giggled.

Nasim.

X

TONY was, he admitted regretfully, disappointed. He'd marched to his assigned quarters in the palace between long lines of *djinn* courtiers, who should have dazzled him with their silks, satins, jewels, and furs. But once a slight noise behind him made him turn his head, and he discovered that the courtiers he had just passed were sneaking away hastily, and he strongly suspected that they were running around ahead of him to assume new forms—including new costumes and jewels—and stand in line again. And, since in assuming a new form they also provided themselves with the costumes and ornaments that went with it, he remained undazzled even by ropes of pearls as big as hen's eggs, and rubies as big as grapefruit, and so on and on. Jewels of that sort, he was able to remark to his alert and highly suspicious conscience, were in rather bad taste. If you tried to pull one off—though that would be bad taste too—it would be like trying to take away somebody's nose or ear. The jewels were, in fact, not marketable commodities. They were in effect paste, and therefore showed a lamentable lack of imagination.

His conscience bitterly reminded him of Ghail's forecasts of libidinous entertainment waiting to refresh him after his journey. Tony brightened. He was more than a little tired, but he had often wondered—as who has not?—what the censors cut one-half so lurid as the stuff they passed.

There was a guard of honor in the anteroom before his suite. Tony went through the motions of inspecting it. Twelve-foot giants looked down at him through yellow cat's-eyes with airs of truculence. The commander of the guard grandly asked for the countersign for Tony's personal guard for the night. Tony thought of Ghail.

"The word," he said, "is 'Solitude.'"

Then he went to look at his bedroom.

Like the rest of his lodging, it was on a scale of lavishness to be found only in three-million-dollar-budget motion-pictures. His bed had apparently been carved from a tremendous limpet-shell; the walls were iridescent; the furniture was onyx and gold; his quarters in the palace in Barkut were practically sub-minimal housing by comparison—yet he could not find a thrill in it. Ghail had

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spoiled everything by that unfortunate comment on the ability of *djinns* to take any form they wished, including chests of coins and jewels. It spoiled things for him. It spoiled even the effect of the utterly lavish, super-tremendous banquet-hall to which he was presently taken for refreshment.

He was very hopeful as the affair began, but he fell into gentle melancholy as the *djinns* gave him the works. They intended, evidently, to give him the sort of evening that would be a True Believer's dream. And from their standpoint it was undoubtedly total entertainment without even the sky as a limit. But Tony derived only a morbid pleasure from the anguished moans of his conscience as the floor-show progressed. To a citizen of the United States, accustomed to a nineteen-dollar radio for music, the Radio City music-hall as seen from a dollar-forty seat, practically any bathing beach in summer, and an occasional burlesque show over in New Jersey, the thing was pathetic.

A normal male inhabitant of Barkut might have been ravished—in several senses—by the crystal bowl of wine which was big enough for several girls to swim in, and by the girls who did swim in it. But Tony had seen colored movies of an All-American girls' swimming meet. An unsophisticated Arab might have been enchanted by the *djinnees* who wore human forms and practically nothing else and who sang lustily and danced enthusiastically for Tony's benefit. But he had seen precision dancers both in person and on the stage. Also, these *djinnees* misguidedly strove for beauty after Arab notions, and in consequence were markedly steatopygian, which is to say, bell-bottomed. So that when by *djinn* standards the performance was at its hottest, Tony was moved to homesickness. There is an art in doing the bumps. There is a definite technique to the strip-tease. And the *djinnees*, willing workers as they were, didn't have it.

Tony's conscience screamed shrilly at the beginning, when he failed to rise and depart amid blushes. But as he sat, a sad and lonely and a disappointed figure, immune to the lavish immorality of the *djinns*, his conscience was amazed. It had been prepared for the battle of its existence, and was girded for it. But antibodies to vice had been generated in Tony's system—so he assured his conscience—by the various forms of entertainment passed by boards of censorship in the United States. He was unaffected by the temptations of the *djinns* because—via technicolor—he had been tempted by professionals against whom the *djinnees* simply did not stand up. In fact, Tony assured his conscience regretfully, it seemed that where *djinnees* were concerned, he simply couldn't take yes for an answer.

BY MIDNIGHT he was yawning. At half-past midnight he could keep his eyes open only with difficulty. At one he went apologetically, and alone, to bed. His conscience could hardly believe it. And when at last it ventured upon those sternly virtuous commendations which, coming from a good conscience, are supposed to be the most precious things in life, Tony yawned again.

But no conscience is approving for more than the briefest of intervals. Tony's almost instantly afterward observed that it was outrageous for him to think of sleeping in his clothes! He hadn't drunk enough for that! He opened boredom-bleared eyes and looked wearily around the magnificence of his sleeping-apartment, and regarded the bed which was surely large enough for more than one person. He had had his lesson. He saw nothing but seemingly in sensate furniture. But he knew better. Benches might totter and fall at any instant. Floor-tiles might crack. And he confessed, to his conscience, what may have been the true reason for his insensibility:

"I just feel," he said drearily, "that I haven't any privacy."

And then he slept.

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Came the dawn. And with the dawn came Nasim. It was so early that Tony had barely opened his eyes. He was thinking those more or less gloomy thoughts with which a man customarily greets a new day, when a small whirlwind some three and a half feet high came in through the doorway of his room. Atop it, Nasim's beaming countenance glowed with excitement. Tony turned over and realized that he had slept fully dressed, including his shoes. He sat up wearily.

"Hello, Nasim. Thanks for the camel-ride. That was you, wasn't it?"

She giggled. "I asked to do it. I said it would be a privilege. It was!" Then she said, "That slave-girl doesn't like you! It's terrible! A slave-girl not liking her master! And you don't like her either. You said she was intelligent. I'm glad I found out! I was going to make a study of her so I could take her form and fool you some day. It would have been a good joke on you! But now I won't."

For some reason, Tony's hair tended to stand up all over his head. But he yawned.

"No," he said. "I wouldn't, if I were you. It wouldn't be amusing." Then he asked, "How'd you get past the guards? Somebody told you the countersign?"

She giggled again. "I was a little centipede running along the floor. They didn't see me. Anyhow, the king wants me to find out why you were bored last night. Were you—" she sighed and looked at him hopefully— "were you being true to me?"

Tony felt a sort of inward jolt. Nasim, in his mind, was associated with beetles and moths-eggs and grease-spots. Now centipedes, too.

"I guess that was a sort of—mm—by-product of something else, Nasim," he said forlornly. "I just didn't feel romantic last night. That's all. Did the king say anything else about me?"

"He's going to execute Es-Souk for trying to kill somebody he's decided he wants to be friends with," said Nasim virtuously. "And he wants you to watch. I feel sorry for poor Es-Souk! He couldn't help being jealous of me! And also the king's terribly anxious to find out how to make you his friend instead of a general for Barkut."

"Do you know," said Tony, "I'd give a lot to know why he's so anxious!"

NASIM beamed at him; just a plump little whirlwind three and a half feet tall, spinning in the middle of Tony's bedroom, which itself looked something like the foyer of a super-plushy hotel at thirty-five dollars a day without bath. She looked, Tony reflected dismally, rather cute for a whirlwind. A bit on the chubby side, to be sure, but anybody who cared for whirlwinds would appreciate Nasim. Such a person would be eager to have her for a pet. Still—

"I'm going to whisper in your ear," said Nasim coyly. "And I'll have to take human form to get close enough."

The whirlwind enlarged a little. Tony watched in alarm as a human figure began to show pinkly through the mist which was Nasim as a whirlwind. He grew apprehensive. He called anxiously:

"Clothes, Nasim!"

His cry came almost too late, but not quite. The very last of the mist which was her whirlwind form materialized about her as a Mother Hubbard wrapper of absolute shapelessness. Then she beamed at him breathlessly.

"I always forget, don't I?"

Even in human form, Nasim was chubby. Her eyes were not the elongated animal eyes of male *djinns*, though, and apparently she had remembered with some care not to have her ears pointed. But Nasim, naturally, could not imagine an expression which was not intellectually *kaput*. She came coyly and sat down on the bed close to Tony. The bed yielded surprisingly under her weight, which gave Tony something to think about.

"I'm going to whisper," she said archly. She bent close—

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Ghail, whispering in his ear on camel-back last night, had provided a very pleasant sensation; but somehow Nasim was different.

"The king wants you for a friend because of the way your nation destroys cities in war," she whispered. *"In just a bit of a second, in flames hotter than the hottest fire."*

She drew back and beamed at him.

"Now, isn't that nice of me?" she demanded aloud. "Listen again!"

She bent over. Tony listened, trying to think what meaning atomic bombs could possibly have to a king of the *djinn.*

"When Es-Souk is executed, it will be like that," the coy voice whispered. *"They'll explode poor Es-Souk, and he will be just a terrible explosion hotter than the hottest flame. And I told the king that you told the slave-girl your country keeps* djinn *on reservations. So the king knows that your country must explode* djinns *to destroy your enemies' cities, and he's afraid you'll tell the people of Barkut how to do it too."*

Tony's flesh crawled. It was not altogether the discovery that when a *djinn* was executed he exploded. Any creature which could change its size from that of a grain of sand to a whirlwind . . . such a creature could not be ordinary matter. Not flesh and blood with sex-hormones and mineral salts to taste. It would have to be something different. A mixture of loosely-knit neutrons and electrons and positrons and so on—Tony's knowledge of nuclear physics came from the Sunday supplements—and even that was startling enough, but not horrifying. The thing that made Tony's flesh crawl was that every *djinn* and *djinnee* must be in effect an atomic bomb. Which could be set off. They'd avoid it if possible, of course. The *djinn* king was scared to death of the bare idea. But no human could feel comfortable sitting on a large bed with an atomic bomb next to him. Especially, perhaps, when the bomb was wearing nothing but a Mother Hubbard wrapper and felt romantic.

Tony got up hastily. Nasim looked reproachfully at him.

"That's not nice!" She pouted. "I tell you nice things and you jump up! Now you sit right back down here and whisper something nice to me!"

TONY shivered. He racked his brains for a suitable thing to say which would be romantic enough and yet not commit him. He bent over.

"You know other djinns *are listening,"* he said, dry-throated. *"So, of course . . ."* Then he swallowed and went on: *"I'm going to ask the king for Es-Souk's life. I don't want him to die on my account. I—"* he gulped audibly—*"I can fight my own battles."* Against atomic bombs, too! his conscience added acidly.

Nasim looked at him in disappointment. "I suppose that's noble of you," she said plaintively, "but it isn't very romantic! You aren't nice to me! You get angry when I forget about wearing clothes, and—"

"I said only last night that you were a pearl among camels, didn't I?" demanded Tony harassedly. "After all, you don't want to rouse the beast in me, do you?"

She giggled, and he added desperately: "—In public?"

"Well. . . ." she said forgivingly, "I hadn't thought of that. I understand now. I'll think of something. And I guess I'll go now."

She got up and trailed toward the door, a dumpy, rotund little figure in a wrapper that dragged lopsidedly on the floor behind her. At the door she stopped and giggled again.

"You saying something about a beast just reminded me," she said brightly. "That slave-girl you brought with you sent a message. She said that if you can spare time from your beastly amusements, the Queen of Barkut wants to talk to you."

Tony tensed all over.

"How the hell do I ring for somebody to guide me around this place?" he de-

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manded feverishly. "She and Ghail are waiting! "

"Anybody'll show you," said Nasim. "Just ask your servants."

"I haven't any servants," said Tony agitatedly. "Only those guards outside."

"Oh, yes, you've got servants," Nasim insisted. "The king told them not to intrude on you but to be on hand if you wanted them. I'm sure he appointed a friend of mine to be your valet. Abdul! Abdul! Where are you?"

Out of the corner of his eye, Tony saw an infinitesimal stirring up near the ceiling. He spun to face it. A cockroach—quite a large cockroach—appeared on top of the drapes by a window. It waggled its feelers at them.

"Hello, Abdul!" said Nasim. "The great prince who is the king's guest wants to see the queen of Barkut in her dungeon. Will you take him there?"

A sudden, geyserlike stream of water spouted out from where the cockroach stood. Hard and powerful, like a three-inch jet from a fire hose. It arched across the room, hit the farther side and splashed loudly, ran down the wall to the floor, and there suddenly jetted upward again in a water-spout which, in turn, solidified into a swaggering short stout *djinn* with a purple turban.

He bowed to the ground before Tony.

"This way, Lord," he said profoundly, "to the Queen of Barkut."

Glassy-eyed, Tony followed him out of the door.

XI

HE FOLLOWED the *djinn* Abdul out the door. Then he stared. There had been a vast anteroom before his suite. He had gone through the motions of inspecting his guard of honor in it. Now there was an enormous swimming-pool in its place, with beyond it a luxuriant jungle of hot-house trees. Tony examined it with startled attention.

"It seems to me that this was a little bit different, last night," he observed.

"Aye, Lord," said the *djinn* solemnly.

He led the way along the swimming-pool's rim. Tony followed. He was worried about the message from Ghail, of course. The night he had just spent had been even aggressively innocent, but somehow he felt that Ghail was not likely to believe it. Her request for him to come to the Queen was not phrased in a way to indicate great confidence in his celibacy. But there was not much that he could do about it.

"Interior decoration among the *djinn*," said Tony, frowning, "is evidently not static art. Things change overnight, eh?"

"Aye, Lord. And oftener," said Abdul solemnly. "We *djinns* have much trouble with boredom. We are the most powerful of created things. There is nothing that we can desire that we cannot have. So we suffer from tedium. Someone grew bored with the anteroom and changed the design."

Tony raised his eyebrows. "I have a glass phial in my pocket," he observed. "Can you change the design of that?"

"It is a human object, Lord," said Abdul with an air of contempt.

Tony grinned. During the night—during his sleep—his conscience had reached some highly moral conclusions which he was inclined to accept. One was that *djinns* were different in kind from humans, but they were not for that reason akin to the angels. Tony went right along with this decision, recalling the floor-show of the night before. More, they were but matter, said his conscience firmly—unstable matter, perhaps, with probably some uranium 235 somewhere in their constitutions, and in the United States the Atomic Energy Commission would take action against them on the ground of national security. But they were not spirits.

They were material. Grossly material. They knew only what they saw, felt, smelled, and heard. They were limited to the senses humans had. Tony had referred to the glass phials in his pocket. Abdul plainly knew nothing about them and could not mystically determine their

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contents, or he would have been scared to death. They contained *lasf*. So it was not possible to keep a secret from a *djinn*. It was not impossible to fool them. It might not be impossible to bluff them.

These were encouraging thoughts. *Djinns* were creatures, and therefore had limitations. They changed massive architectural features of the *djinn* king's palace overnight, but they could not—it was a reasonable inference—change the form of a human artifact. Therefore it was probable that the things they could change were of the same kind of matter as themselves—

Tony's guide opened a door. It should have given upon a passageway of snowy white. Its walls should have been of ivory, perhaps mastodon-tusks, most intricately carved in not very original designs. Instead, beyond the door Tony found a corridor which was an unusually lavish aquarium. It had walls of crystal with unlikely tropical fish swimming behind them. The fish wore golden collars and were equipped with pearl-studded underwater castles to suffer ennui in.

Which was a clue. It occurred to Tony that he had not yet seen one trace of a civilization which could be termed *djinnian*, as opposed to human. Everything he had seen was merely an elaboration, a magnification, an over-lavish complication, of the designs and possessions of men. Humans wore clothes, so the *djinns* wore garments made after human patterns only more lavish and improbable. Humans had palaces, so the *djinn* king had a palace which outpalaced anything mere humans could contrive. But the riches of the *djinn* were unstable, their lavishness had no meaning, and they had no originality at all. In his home world, Tony reflected, *djinns* would only really fit in Hollywood.

He cheered up enormously. In his pocket he had three phials of *lasf*. If his opinion was correct, the palace was constructed of the same material as the dragon in the narrow pass, the two colossi before that, and the row of giants on the final lap to the palace gateway. If he uncorked one of the phials, it was probable that the walls about him would begin to sneeze and flee away in the form of whirlwinds—one whirlwind for each unit of the edifice. The *djinn* palace had an exact analogy in the living structures of the army ants of Central America, which cling together to form a shelter and a palace—complete with roof, walls, floors, and passageways—for the army-ant queen whenever she feels in the mood to lay some eggs. But the *djinns* were not sexless like the army ants. Nasim's romantic impulses seemed proof enough of that. And besides—well—the *djinnees* who had danced for him last night had displayed an enthusiasm which simply wasn't all synthetic. They had something more than a theoretic knowledge of what it was all about. What they had lacked was art.

IT WAS with an increasing feeling of competence, then, that Tony strode off to answer Ghail's summons. He began to anticipate his audience with the king of the *djinns* with less aversion. And somehow, the atomic-bomb aspect of the *djinns* tended to fade away. Ghail had never mentioned anything of the kind. Humans, apparently, did not know that *djinns* were fissionable. So it was unlikely that they could be set off by accident. But it was still hard to imagine getting romantic with an atomic bomb, even if it wasn't fused.

More doorways. They passed through parts of the palace with which Tony was naturally unfamiliar, and whose features as of today he could not compare with yesterday's. Then they reached a quite small, quite inconspicuous doorway, and the *djinn* Abdul stopped before it and bowed low again.

"The residence of the Queen of Barkut Lord," he said blandly.

Tony stepped out-of-doors, onto a sort of dry meadow with patches of parched grass here and there. The sun shone brightly. He heard a bird singing rather

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monotonously, and he assured himself that no *djinn* was making that noise! A hundred-odd yards away there was a clump of trees and among the trees a small group of mud-walled houses which were plainly human buildings, not too expertly made, with completely human implements about them.

Tony advanced. Someone waved to him, and he felt his heart pound ridiculously faster. But as he drew nearer yet, he saw that it wasn't Ghail. It was a stout, motherly woman with her gown tucked up to reveal sturdy, sun-browned calves. She seemed to have been working in a garden. He saw a neatly-hoed patch of melons, and a field of onions and other vegetables. The woman beamed at Tony and said:

"The Queen is in there. You are the Lord Toni?"

Tony nodded. Abdul looked oddly uncomfortable.

"When you go back to Barkut," said the woman, "do try to get them to send us some sweets! We haven't had any sweets for months!" Then she said tolerantly to Abdul: "Not that you don't try, of course!"

Abdul wriggled unhappily. "I will wait here, Lord," he said sadly. "It is not fitting for a *djinn*, of the most powerful of created beings, to be made mock of by a mere human. Perhaps I will go back and wait by the door."

Ghail came out of the largest building —it would have no more than two or three rooms, and was of a single story —and regarded Tony with a deliberately icy air. She said:

"Greetings, Lord."

Just then the motherly woman said comfortingly to the short stout *djinn:*

"Oh, don't go away, Abdul! I'll watch your magic tricks for a while—if they're good ones."

Abdul wavered. Tony grinned at Ghail. He said critically:

"Of the two of us, you look most like you had a hangover. Have you been crying?"

"With my Queen," said Ghail with dignity, "over the sadness of her captivity."

Then a pleasant slender sun-browned woman came out beside Ghail and nodded in a friendly fashion to Tony. He gaped at her. She had the comfortable air of an unmarried woman who is quite content to be unmarried. Which is not in the least like a queen. The palace of the *djinn* king loomed up on all sides, but here in the center things were different. These houses did not look like a dungeon, to be sure. Here was a meadow half a mile this way by half a mile that, with these buildings and gardens in the center so that it looked like a small farm. The contrast between these structures and the magnificence of the palace was odd enough. The atmosphere of reasonably complete contentment was stranger still. The Queen looked as if she were having a perfectly comfortable time here, and was as well-satisfied as anybody ought to be.

"This," said Ghail stiltedly, "is the Lord Toni."

XII

THE Queen smiled. There was flour on her hands, as if she had been cooking something.

"Have you breakfasted, Lord Toni?" she asked.

"Well—no," admitted Tony.

"Then come in," said the Queen, "and we will talk while you do."

They entered a small room, an almost bare room, a peasant's general-purpose room which had the shining neatness of a house with no man in it to mess it up. But this had not the fussy preciosity of too many possessions. There was a small fire burning on a raised hearth, giving off a distinctly acrid smell which yet was not unpleasant.

"You will have coffee," said the Queen, "and whatever else we can find. We are a little straitened for food today, because so much went for your meal last night."

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Tony had been dazed, but this was a jolt which showed in his expression. The Queen laughed.

"The *djinns* have their own foods," she explained. "But no human being can eat of their dainties. When I was first made prisoner the king used to raid caravans to get food for me, but it was very tedious! So now I have my own garden, and someone—I think it was Abdul—stole chickens for me. When you came as a guest they asked me for food for you, and I gave it. Of course. You probably did not notice, but no matter what you pointed to in all the dishes they paraded before you, you actually got—" she chuckled—"no more than flesh of chicken, and eggs, and cheese and dates and salad! That was all I had for you."

Tony said painfully:

"Majesty, I think I ought to make some appropriate speech. But I don't know what to say!"

She busied herself at the fireplace, and Ghail went quickly to help. The two of them gave Tony his coffee, and a melon, and eggs. It went very well.

"You are going to defeat the *djinns*, Ghail tells me," the queen said practically. "She assures me you will destroy them to the last small *djinning*. I hope not."

Tony goggled at her. "But—"

"Oh, I know!" said the Queen. "I am their prisoner, and so on. But in their way they're rather cute."

Tony stared.

"I've lived among them four years," the Queen said briskly. "I've had them around all the time. They're a little bit like men, and a good deal more like children, and quite a lot like kittens. I suppose you'd say that I've made pets of them. Of course they won't let me go home, but it isn't bad."

Tony chewed and swallowed, and then said carefully:

"I'm afraid I don't quite understand."

THE Queen shrugged. "They're terribly vain, like men. If possible, more so. You can do anything with a *djinn* if you flatter him. They're terrible show-offs, like children. My maid outside can wind Abdul around her little finger any time. He loves to show off his transformations, and she watches him. The other *djinns* won't. And they're like kittens because they're so completely selfish. But that's very much like men and children, too."

Tony said in astonishment:

"But they're a menace to Barkut—"

"Of course!" the Queen conceded impatiently. "They're dangerous to Barkut in the same way that a troop of—say—wild apes would be dangerous to a village near where they lived. They steal, and they destroy, and they probably kill people now and then. But it's because they can't understand people and people can't understand them."

"There's a war—" began Tony.

"Oh, the war!" The Queen dismissed it scornfully. "That's what all wars are about. Misunderstandings. Marriages are too, probably. Men are so absurd! That's why I have to stay a prisoner."

Ghail said warningly:

"Majesty!"

The Queen regarded Ghail with impatience.

"My dear, you cannot deny that I am patriotic! I have no children, so I can be patriotic! But for the same reason I haven't any particular prejudice against the *djinns*. Do you remember how I used to adore horses? I've come to like the *djinns* as well, that's all. I admit that it seems terribly silly to me that I have to stay here because the *djinn* king's vanity is involved in holding me prisoner! If I were to escape and go back to Barkut, he'd feel that he had to attack it furiously to recapture me. So I can't go home until he's conquered. So I simply want the Lord Toni to realize that as far as I am concerned—"

Ghail said again:

"Majesty!"

Tony looked sharply at Ghail and at the Queen. Ghail was young and very desirable. The Queen was less young and

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contentedly undesirous. She laughed frankly.

"Very well, Ghail!" And to Tony she said: "I think that even as a captive queen, though, I can amend my council's orders to say that it will not be necessary to exterminate the *djinns* completely! I should think, in fact, that if they were suitably subdued, a few tame ones kept around the palace would be quite pleasant. They'd be excellent for the prestige of the throne of Barkut, too!"

Tony said painfully:

"Majesty—"

"It's really too bad you came to Barkut at all," the Queen said, though with no unfriendliness. "Humans and *djinns* alike believe that if anybody can bring about a human victory, you can. So the humans won't consent to a compromise until they've tried for conquest. And if they would, the *djinns* would be sure they knew they couldn't win, and they wouldn't compromise until they'd tried for conquest! It's so silly! We really could get along without fighting, if we tried! I've been working the *djinn* king. He was willing to come to a compromise, but—male vanity again!—only on condition that the Queen of Barkut married him. And that seemed to be out of the question."

"It was out of the question!" snapped Ghail, her eyes angry.

"I was wearing him down," protested the Queen. "After all, if he had his harem of *djinnees*, a private agreement that his marriage to a human queen would be a form and not a fact—"

"Absolutely out of the question!" repeated Ghail, her color high. "Absolutely!"

The Queen sighed.

"I know it is, my dear . . . and it's too late now, anyhow. The Lord Toni has come. The humans think he's going to lead them to victory. The *djinns* are sure that if he can't, the war goes to them." She looked at Tony, frowning. "Of course you've got to win, Lord Toni! Of course! Humans as the slaves of *djinns* would be in a terrible state! It would be like being enslaved by apes or —children! And apes make nice pets—I had one once—and children are doubtless very well, but apes or children or *djinns* would be horrible masters! But the *djinns* are so amusing—"

"I'm getting a trifle confused," admitted Tony.

The Queen nodded kindly.

"I know," she said condescendingly. "You men only really talk to each other. You don't often see things straight. If you only talked to women more . . . about things that really matter, that is—"

"May Allah forbid!" said Tony grimly. "I've never yet talked to a woman who didn't try to make me apologize for being a man, or any who'd have bothered to talk to me if I hadn't been! You are a queen, Majesty, and you're giving me what I take to be rather complicated instructions. I'm only a man. So whatever I do—because I'm a man—you will explain should have been done differently. No man can ever do anything exactly the way a woman would like him to, but whatever he does, women will make the best of it. So I'm not going to try to do whatever it is you're trying to command. I'm going to handle this my way!"

HE SPOKE hotly, through a natural association of their viewpoint with that of his conscience. Which had reason behind it, at that. But at the same time, he wondered rather desperately what his own way would be.

The Queen regarded him complacently.

"I know. Men are like that." Then she added. "I think you and Ghail will be very happy."

Ghail turned crimson. She stamped her foot furiously.

"Majesty!" she cried. "You go too far—"

There was a small-sized uproar outside. The voice of the stout woman, in alarm:

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"Abdul! Abdul! You can't do things like that!"

Tony plunged to the door. At the foot of the wall which was the *djinn* king's palace, almost a quarter of a mile away, there was a twelve-foot soldier-*djinn* who by his gestures had just communicated some message of importance. In the stretch between the wall and the farmhouse, a charging rhinocerous raced at top speed. It plunged toward the small group of buildings. Fifty yards away it seemed to stumble, crash, and in mid-air turned into a round ball with spiral red-and-white stripes which made a dizzying spectacle as it rolled. It was five feet in diameter. It checked abruptly two yards from the Queen's door and there abruptly wrinkled itself, changed color, and collapsed into the short, fat, swaggering *djinn* with a turban who was Tony's guide to this place, who was Nasim's friend Abdul, and who had awaited a summons to duty as a valet in the form of a cockroach atop the window-hangings of Tony's bedroom.

He bowed profoundly.

"Lord," he said, "there is a message from the king. Es-Souk, who was to have been executed today for your amusement, has escaped from his prison. He undoubtedly seeks you, Lord, to attempt your murder before his own death, since he cannot live under the king's displeasure."

TONY felt himself growing just a little pale. He remembered fingers closing on his throat, and an elephant-sized monster in his bedroom in the palace at Barkut, beating its breast before falling upon him to demolish him utterly.

That — irrelevently — suggested the only possible source of action. Tony gulped and said:

"Thank you, Abdul. Tell the King I am very much obliged for the warning. But tell him not to worry about it. I won't need any extra guards. I'll handle Es-Souk. In fact, I'll help hunt for him as soon as I've—as soon as I've refilled my cigarette-lighter."

XIII

HE WENT back into the house. His knees felt queer. He fumbled in his pockets. He brought out the lighter, and then brought out one of the small glass phials Ghail had given him in the camel-cabin on the way across the desert—one of those containing *lasf*.

Ghail looked pale, too.

"What are you going to do?" she demanded. Her voice trembled.

"Attend to Es-Souk, I hope," said Tony, with quite unnatural calm. To the Queen he said: "Majesty, if you have any pet *djinns* around at the moment, you'd better chase them out. I'm opening up a phial of *lasf*."

"But—"

"I've got an idea," said Tony. "It doesn't make sense, but nothing makes much sense any more. I'm going to take advantage of what I think is a generally occurring allergic reaction among *djinns*." The words "allergic reaction" had no Arabic equivalent, so he had to use the English ones, and to Ghail and the Queen of Barkut they sounded remarkably learned and mysterious. "And just to make sure, I'd appreciate it enormously if you'd draw me a picture of the leaf of the *lasf* plant."

He unscrewed the seal of the cigarette-lighter tank. It was bone-dry of fluid, of course. It hadn't been filled since Suakim. And while confined in his later cell it had been extremely annoying to have to get a light for an occasional cigarette, rolled from local tobacco, from a brazier kept burning by the guards outside his gate. Now the lighter was a godsend. If he was right about *lasf*, a cigarette-lighter was the ideal weapon in which to use it.

He extracted the stopper of the small glass phial. With not especially steady fingers he poured the liquid into the tank. It soaked up and soaked up. Its odor was noticeable. Presently the wick was moist. He re-sealed the tank and snapped down the lighter's cover. He restopped the phial and put it away.

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"Now I'd like to wash my hands," he said unhappily, "and—is that the picture of the *lasf* leaf?"

The Queen had stooped and traced an outline on the clay floor of her dwelling. She said:

"I'm quite sure. Yes."

Tony stared at it and sighed in enormous relief. Ghail brought a bowl of water. He washed his hands with meticulous care. He dried them on a cloth she handed him.

"If you keep pet *djinns* around," he observed, "better burn that cloth. Right away. And I'd empty the water on soft earth and throw more earth on top of it. No use revealing that you've got *lasf* around, until you need it. The faintest whiff would give it away to them."

Ghail said again:

"But wh-what are you going to do?"

"I'm going to hunt Es-Souk," said Tony. "I think the *djinn* king is putting something over on me. I had a fight with Es-Souk in my bedroom in Barkut. He ran away. There's been talk of atomic bombs and the king thinks I can make them. But he wants to make sure. I'm under safe-conduct, of course, but if a condemned criminal—Es-Souk—breaks loose and kills me, the king can't be blamed. He'll apologize all over the place, of course. He'll probably offer to pay reparations and indemnity, and salute the Barkutian flag, and all that. But I'll be dead. And the war will go on merrily. You see?"

"But that's—dishonorable!" protested Ghail.

"Nothing's dishonorable," said Tony gloomily, "unless you can prove it. And you'd never prove that! Just helping hunt for Es-Souk is no good. I've got to meet him in single combat, somehow, and whup him again so the King will know I do it without mirrors or outside help. If I do that, maybe we'll get somewhere."

He turned to go out the door. Ghail caught at his sleeve.

"P-please!" she said shakily. Her eyes were brimming. Tony saw the Queen regarding them critically. He was embarrassed.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Last—last night—"

Tony sighed deeply.

"Listen," he said. "If you want to sign a pledge that the lips that touch *djinnees'* shall never touch yours, you go right ahead! It won't interfere with my plans in the least. Is that satisfactory?"

"I—don't understand," said Ghail faintly.

Tony regarded her in weary gloom.

"Oh, all right!" He spread out his hands, holding the cigarette-lighter in one of them. "Maybe you don't. But I'll bet Esir and Esim would!"

He went out the door to find Abdul waiting for him expectantly. Behind the door he heard Ghail sob. He marched heavily off toward the palace door, a quarter of a mile away. Abdul followed interestedly. Tony's conscience spoke to him acidly, mentioning his discourtesy to Ghail and the fact that he hadn't even said goodbye to the Queen of Barkut. He snarled at it, out loud. In consequence he did not hear Ghail say, between weeping and fury:

"The—b-beast! Oh-h-h-h, the *beast!*"

Nor did he hear the Queen say approvingly:

"I'm sure you're going to be very happy with him, my dear! You'll never quite know what he's going to do next!"

THIS was, however, one of the few times when Tony himself did know what he was going to do. He was angry. He grew angrier. The whole affair was simply too pat. It was too perfectly coincidental. It was exactly the sort of thing that the heads of nations in his own world—the heads of some nations, at any rate—had pulled off too many times. Tony had not yet met the *djinn* king, but he felt that he was being manipulated with the sort of smug clumsiness characteristic of power politicians. The *djinn* king in all his official acts was ineffably virtuous and chivalrous. He'd

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invited Tony to visit him under safe-conduct, he'd provided him with a guard, with entertainment, he'd paid him extravagant honors—and he was arranging for him to be assassinated by someone whom he could afterward execute with every expression of horror for his crime.

"He's a damned—he's a damned totalitarian," Tony growled.

He stamped into the palace, too angry to be scared any longer. There is a certain indignation of the naive and the imaginative which practical men and politcians never understand. The innocent common citizen who believes in hair-tonics and radio commercials and the capitalist system, believes most firmly of all that justice and decency are going to triumph. He will endure with infinite patience as long as that belief is not challenged. But let him see injustice fortifying itself for a permanent reign; let him see deceit become frankly self-confident; then he explodes! More tyrants and dictators have been overthrown for trying to make their regimes permanent than for all their crimes. In all that had gone before, Tony had been less active than acted-upon. But now he was furious.

He found the fifteen-foot captain of his personal guard of honor. He said harshly to that cat-eyed giant:

"Captain! You will take a message immediately to your king! Say to him that as his guest, I request a favor of the highest importance! I wish a proclamation to be made everywhere within the palace saying that I, your king's guest, have been insulted by one Es-Souk, who after attempting to assassinate me while I slept, fled in terror when I grappled with him. The proclamation is to say that I had intended to ask the king to pardon him so that he could accept my challenge, and that now I have demanded of the king that I still be allowed to do battle with Es-Souk unless he is afraid to fight me. The king, therefore, grants safe-conduct to Es-Souk to an appointed place of single combat, and that the king commands his presence there because of the disgrace to all the *djinn* folk if one of them is too much a coward to fight a single man. And you will tell the king that if Es-Souk is afraid to fight me—as I believe—then I demand that some other *djinn* take his place unless all *djinns* are afraid of me!"

The guard-captain towered over Tony, more than twice his height. For the honorable post of official guardian of the king's guest's safety, he had chosen a form neatly combining impressiveness and ferocity. He looked remarkably like an oversized black leopard walking on his hind legs and wearing a green-and-gold velvet uniform. Now his cat-eyes glared down into Tony's. But Tony, staring up, stared him down.

"Incidentally," snarled Tony, "you can tell the king that I'm quite aware that I'm being insulting, and that nobody will blame him if I get killed in single combat of this sort!"

"Lord," purred the *djinn* captain of the guard, "I shall give the king your message."

He saluted and walked with feline grace toward the nearest doorway. There, however, he was momentarily stalled, because some other *djinn* assigned to being a part of the palace had grown bored with the design of his part of the structure, and had changed the door-sizes. The captain of the guard had to stoop and crawl through a doorway to go on his errand.

TONY paced up and down, growing angrier by the second. He had never fancied himself as a fighting man, and he did not fancy himself as one now. He simply felt the consuming fury of a man who feels that somebody is trying to make a sucker out of him. He fairly steamed with fury.

His valet, Abdul, watched him with wide eyes. He saw Tony muttering to himself, white with the anger which filled him. He said unhappily:

"Lord—"

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Tony whirled on him.

"What is it?" he demanded savagely.

"You are very angry," said Abdul. "And—Lord, created beings do not grow angry when they are afraid. You are not afraid."

"Is that all?" demanded Tony.

Abdul squirmed as if embarrassed. As if embarrassed, too, his whole body rippled in the beginning of a transformation into something else. He repressed it and returned to the appearance of a short, stout, swaggering *djinn* with a turban. But he was not swaggering now.

"It appears, Lord," he said apologetically, "that you know you can destroy Es-Souk, or whatever other champion appears to do battle with you."

Tony glared at him. He thought he could, but he was not sure. His line of reasoning was tenuous, but he believed it enough, certainly, to risk his life on it. Yet he could not have managed that belief, at all, without his hot anger at the clumsily smart trick the *djinn* king had so obviously contrived. It was not fair. It was too smart. And it was complacent. The complacency may have been the most enraging part of the whole thing.

"I am quite willing," said Tony, strangling with fury, "to take on the whole damned *djinn* nation, beginning now, and including your fellow-*djinns* who happen to be the floors and walls of this room!"

Abdul said tentatively:

"Lord, we *djinn* are the most powerful of created beings. Therefore we can only have as our ruler the most powerful of created beings. Any less—any whom we could destroy—it would be beneath our dignity to obey."

Tony turned his back. He paced up and down. There was a pause. Then:

"I take a great risk," said Abdul plaintively. "Lord, will you permit me to obey you?"

"No!" snapped Tony. "Go to the devil! Get out!"

Abdul sighed. Mournfully, but elegantly, he turned into a large mass of black, inky liquid which sank in funeral fashion to the floor and flowed toward the doorway. But it did not open the door—it went out through the crack underneath. Tony was alone.

He looked at the cigarette-lighter in his hand. He touched his three separate pockets where phials of *lasf*—one almost empty, now—reposed. He reflected with savage satisfaction that it was not likely that he could be killed without some mangling, and that at least one of the bottles of *lasf* was practically sure to be smashed. And Tony's information on *lasf* was confined to about three sentences from Ghail, and one experience. And the picture of the leaf Queen had drawn. That was all he knew. But he could extend his knowledge of a common phenomenom in the United States and guess that the Barkutian use of *lasf* was woefully inefficient. With a cigarette-lighter he could do better.

The door opened again. The commander of the guard of honor was back. He saluted profoundly.

"Lord," he purred. "The king has made the proclamation you requested. He has appointed a place for the combat. He has given Es-Souk safe-conduct, and Es-Souk has appeared from hiding in the form of a rug on the audience-chamber floor and prepares himself for battle."

"Very well," snapped Tony, "I'll go there at once. If he isn't afraid, he'll follow immediately."

The *djinn* captain saluted again, with enormous formality, and withdrew for the second time.

SOMETHING stirred on the floor. A cockroach waggled its feelers imploringly, turned into an explosively expanding mistiness, and condensed again as Abdul.

"Lord!" said the stout *djinn* imploringly. "Hear me but a moment! The walls of this palace hear and report to the king! I asked to obey you. The king will know. If you do not accept me and

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protect me, I am lost!"

Tony shrugged.

"Unless," he said skeptically, "this is more of your king's conniving!"

"I swear by the beard of the Prophet!" panted Abdul. "Truly, Lord, I can be most useful! Protect me, Lord, and you will have the fleetest horse, the swiftest hound . . . I will carry you to the place of combat! I will bring you the fairest women! I will steal chickens—"

"Hm . . ." said Tony. "I suspect I did talk too fast. Where is this place of combat, anyhow?"

"I know, Lord! I will take you there—"

"Then," said Tony, "let's get started."

"This way, Lord!" panted Abdul. "I beg you, Lord, protect me until we are free of the palace—and after. Indeed I spoke too soon. Here—the window, Lord. . . ."

He raised the window. With an imploring gesture for Tony to follow, he jumped out. Tony walked to the window and looked out. There was no sign whatever of Abdul—but a wide stairway led to the ground from the windowsill. Tony swung up and tested it with his foot. It held. He went down. Instantly he touched the earth the stairway collapsed into a cloud of dust which coalesced and was Abdul again. He wrung his hands.

"I should have waited," he said miserably. "Indeed, the king will call me a traitor. But if you are truly the most powerful—I am your steed, Lord!"

He was. There was a rippling, a shifting, a bewildering alteration of plane surfaces and colors, and he was a highly suitable horse, fully saddled and caparisoned. The horse came trotting to Tony's side and waited for him to mount. He put his foot on the stirrup and heaved his leg over.

"Okay so far," he said grimly. "Full speed ahead!"

The horse—Abdul—broke into a headlong run which was convincingly like real panic. It headed away from the palace at a pace even the *djinn* camels of the trip across the desert could not have bettered.

And, as a matter of fact, the appearance of things was enough to justify some apprehension. Word of the approaching duel to the death had evidently spread. Out of the gateway of the palace the *djinns* poured. They wore every one of the eccentric shapes Tony had noted in the line of courtiers welcoming him the night before. There were still some wearing the shapes of human women—those who had danced for him the night before. And as they poured out of the palace, the *djinns* whose shapes were adapted for speed retained them, while others dissolved into forms capable of more miles per hour. The whole assemblage looked like a glorified zoo in flight toward one distant spot. Even the palace began to come apart and join the rush. Item after item of its structure vanished from its place, swelled into a tall and somehow ghostlike whirlwind, and swept away in eager competition for good seats at the spectacle.

When the horse stopped Tony swung out of the saddle, and the short, fat *djinn* of the turban reappeared. He was utterly doleful.

"Lord," he said bitterly, "my life is in your hands! If you do not win this battle, the king will surely execute me in Es-Souk's stead! I beg you to conquer in this battle!"

Tony wetted his finger to gauge the direction of the wind. He made sure of his handkerchief. He stooped and picked up a pair of medium-sized stones and slipped them in his pocket. Then he waited.

He was in a huge, natural amphitheatre some four miles long by two wide. Its floor was practically desert sand. All about, on the mountainsides, were perched the *djinn*. The foremost rows were dots, but successive rearward rows were larger to get better views, until at the very back tall whirlwinds spun eagerly, reaching ever higher for full

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vision of what was to come.

The last arrivals settled into place. The entire *djinn* nation watched. Abdul despairingly shivered, and turned himself into a small stone, indistinguishable from any other. Tony waited in the center of the vast open space. And waited.

And waited.

XIV

TONY'S conscience said bitterly that since he was going to be killed anyhow, he might as well make a fight for it; but if he'd only listened at any single instant since Mr. Emurian offered him two thousand dollars for than ten-dirhim piece—

He swore softly. He felt singularly absurd, standing in the middle of a dusty, sandy plain with a cigarette-lighter clutched in his hand, two small stones in his pocket, and with a multitude of lunatic shapes watching intently from the mountainsides about, and misty, ghost-like whirlwinds spinning expectantly beyond them.

For a long time, nothing happened.

"War of nerves," he muttered indignantly.

The small stone which was Abdul quivered, and seemed to inflate like a balloon. Abdul appeared in his customary shape, very much agitated.

"Lord! Do you see him?"

"Not yet," growled Tony. "I suppose he'll fly to contact as a mosquito and then materialize as a boa-constrictor at close quarters. Stand clear if he does."

"He cannot do it, Lord," said Abdul, nervously. "He can take the shape of an insect, but as an insect he will be too heavy to fly. Our weight is the same regardless of our size, Lord."

"Good!" said Tony, gratified. "Then in sand like this he can't crawl up as a centipede, either. He'd bog down."

Abdul wrung his hands.

"I spoke too soon when I offered you my allegiance," he said bitterly. "It is my opinion, Lord, that he will fly to a great height as a giant bird—he will need great wing-spread to fly—and then turn to a stone and drop upon you. That is an accepted form of combat."

"Hm . . . thanks," said Tony. "If anything else occurs to you, by all means mention it."

Abdul began to shrink. He wailed again:

"I spoke too soo—"

He was a stone once more. Tony could not possibly identify him among the other small stones scattered about. He began to search the sky, and remembered to wet his finger again and recheck the wind-direction. There was very little movement of air, but he walked down-wind from Abdul and snapped open his cigarette-lighter. *Lasf*, as prepared in Barkut, had a distinct, slightly aromatic odor. Tony surrounded himself with a faint fragrance of the stuff. He could smash one of the phials of *lasf* yet remaining and make himself effectually unapproachable by Es-Souk. But he would certainly have to walk home if he did. And besides, Es-Souk could pick up stones and drop them, bomber-fashion, as easily as he could drop himself. Apparently, though, that was not an accepted form of combat. It appeared that *djinns* were so endowed that they could make anything they chose out of themselves, and therefore did not need to think of using inanimate things. It would not be good strategy to make Es-Souk so desperate that he might begin to have ideas.

And still nothing happened. There was what seemed to be a single dark bird in the sky, far away over the mountain-tops. Tony wondered how far away. The larger a pair of wings might be, the more slowly they would tend to flap. Tony watched. The great bird's wings went downward only once in five seconds—it took five seconds for them to make their downward sweep, and recover, and begin another stroke. It looked as if it were flying in slow motion. Therefore the bird was very large, and very far away.

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TONY nodded his head. At a guess, Es-Souk had adopted the outward form of a roc, and would gain an altitude of some ten or twelve thousand feet in that shape. Then he might transform himself into a heavy small stone and try to brain Tony. But it wasn't likely that, as a stone, he could see where he was going or correct his line of fall once he was started. Even U. S. Army bombers, equipped with bombsights, suffered a certain amount of dispersion in their shots.

Inspiration struck Tony. He took off the camel's-hair, belted-in-the-back top-coat. When in human form, *djinns* wore clothes—when they remembered. Nasim was apt to be forgetful. But the clothes they created were a part of them, like their jewels and their weapons. They might know the theory of clothing, but in practise for Tony to take off his top-coat might confuse Es-Souk. He mightn't know whether to aim at the coat or at Tony himself. And besides, if that slowly flapping bird was a roc, and if the roc was Es-Souk, he probably couldn't see too clearly at the height he'd attained. Tony draped his coat over a small, sparsely-leaved bush that startlingly grew in the middle of this waste. He stood back. He was giving Es-Souk two targets to choose from, and the need for choice might be upsetting.

Apparently, it was. The great bird soared in circles for minutes. Then it dived lower, for a better look. Tony stood as still as his top-coat. He could see the shape of the huge flying thing. It was like a giant eagle, only vastly more terrifying. Its body would be seventy or eighty feet long. Its wings would have the spread of a four-motored bomber. Its claws would have the grip of half-a-dozen steam-shovels in one. And its talons would be needle-sharp and more than three feet long. Decidedly, at close quarters, it wouldn't be anything to argue with—

It vanished. Completely. Es-Souk had turned himself into a small round stone hurtling downward from the sky.

Tony counted:

"One—two—three—"

Give the stone time to pick up speed in free fall. The time a parachuting flier waits before he opens his parachute.

"Eight—nine—ten—*Geronimo!*" said Tony.

He ran like the devil for fifty yards, stopped, and watched the spot where he had been. Then his jaw dropped open. His top-coat was running like the devil, too. The bush on which he had draped it was in full flight. As he stared, he saw the twinkling of pink legs under it. Then his top-coat stopped, and turned, and he saw Nasim in human form inside it. She waved gaily to him.

"Hello!" she called brightly. "I'm helping, too!"

WHOOOOOSH!

Something smacked the desert a mighty blow. Dust arose as from a bomb-explosion. A concussion-wave spread out with such power that Tony felt a puff of wind, and the top-coat went sailing from around Nasim. She had been forgetful again. She went after the coat and picked it up, swinging it cheerily in one hand as she turned to watch.

Es-Souk arose from the crater which he had made as a stone. He had a new form. He was huge and—now—black and terrible to behold. He was a giant of ebony flesh with four-foot tusks and hands whose clawed finger-tips were feet in length.

Tony ran toward him, blowing on the wick of the cigarette-lighter.

THE giant bellowed, but Tony sprinted even faster for hand-to-hand contact. And the *djinn* could not quite take it. Tony's challenge had included so furious an insult to the entire *djinn* nation that it could not possibly be a bluff—and now his confident rush to close in on Es-Souk was daunting.

Es-Souk spurted upward into a whirlwind half-a-mile high. He materialized

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as a roc at the top of the column of misty whirling air. The rest of the whirlwind flashed upward to be absorbed in the bird's body. It was an admirable technical solution of the problem of a quick take-off for so large a flying creature. Gigantic flappings of mighty pinions sent the roc soaring away. Es-Souk was uncertain. He did not quite know what to do. To cover his indecision, he suddenly swooped and made what looked like a dive-bomber plunge for Tony.

It was utterly horrible to watch. The monstrous creature, its incredibly curved beak gaping, plunged for him in ravening ferocity. Its claws were stretched to rend and tear. It was as perfectly calculated to inspire panic as any sight could possibly be.

Tony faced it. He had a phial of *lasf* in his handkerchief, now. In the handkerchief, too, were the small stones he'd pocketed. He held the cigarette-lighter in his left hand. His right gripped that singularly innocuous bomb. At the last instant he'd squeeze, crush the phial between the stones, and hurl the dripping handkerchief—weighted by the stones—deep into the gaping throat. He didn't know how quickly it would work, but—

The roc zoomed just as Tony was sending the message to his fingers to tense and smash the *lasf*-phial. The great wings beat horrifically. Sand rose in clouds about Tony, blinding him. He found himself almost buried to his knees as the sand settled about him.

The roc was flapping into the sky again. Nasim ran up to Tony, beaming and offering him the coat.

"You're wonderful!" she said adoringly. "What are you going to do next? And what do you want me to do?"

He said indignantly:

"You shouldn't mix into a private fight like this, Nasim!"

"Oh, do let me help!" she pleaded.

"Hell!" said Tony. "Put on something! Put on the coat! How do you expect me to keep my mind on fighting?"

The roc which was Es-Souk made a steep, banking turn. It power-dived at Tony again. And this time Es-Souk had a purpose, a new purpose. He'd seen Tony struggling up out of the sand. So Es-Souk came back only yards above the desert's surface, his monstrous wings beating almost straight back to give him the absolute maximum of speed. Then, only fifty feet from Tony, he swept his wings violently ahead, and not only checked his own speed and sent himself hurtling upward, but set up such a furious smother of swirling sand that Tony was buried breast-deep before he realized what was happening. Es-Souk had made a sizable sand-dune with one stroke of his mighty roc's wings. It was sheer fortune that its deepest part did not overwhelm Tony.

He worked his way clear, Nasim pulling anxiously at him—with the top-coat lost again. Tony swore furiously. Something like a bubble appeared in the sand-dune's flank. Abdul appeared and arose, with sand-grains dripping from his turban. He sputtered and wailed:

"I know I spoke too soon! . . . Lord! Next time he will bury you, and you will smother, and then what will I do?"

Es-Souk whirled again, low-down, and shot back toward Tony again. Nasim said firmly:

"Don't be so stupid, Abdul! Turn yourself into a griffin, with a saddle, and let him ride you to fight Es-Souk in the air!"

Abdul blinked and hastily drew a deep breath. He expanded, to a large round object with no identifiable features. He contracted to something that Tony could not identify, and which at the moment he did not examine. He saw wings and a saddle and a long, serpentine tail. He made a dash for the saddle, swung into it, and hung on.

XV

AND he felt himself shooting skyward with breathtaking velocity! There was one instant when a huge, feathered body was directly below him—a body so huge that it gave him the queer sensa-

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tion of being an insect chased by an infuriated hen. Then he was clear and rising. There were great, veined wings beating on either side, there was a scaly body below him, doubtlessly a serpentine tail behind him, and a long, snaky neck in front with a head he could not see clearly.

That neck twisted and a specifically indefinite face appeared—or rather, did not appear. It looked like mist, yet there were eyes in it, and Abdul's plaintive voice came to Tony above the beat of mighty wings.

"Lord," said Abdul miserably, "if you have some weapon to use against Es-Souk, if you tell me how you wish to use it, I will try to give you the opportunity. If you do not win this fight, Lord, I am ruined!"

"I've got a weapon, all right," said Tony. "I'd intended to use it on the ground, away from you and Nasim. It's pretty deadly to any *djinn* anywhere nearby."

Abdul made a moaning sound.

"But if anything happens to you," said Tony, "I'll have a nasty fall. So—hm . . . get us some height, and then if you can let Es-Souk dive at me from behind, I think I can use my weapon so you won't be affected."

The desert shrank as the unnamed creature into which Abdul had transformed himself strove desperately for height. Tony found a strap hitched to the saddle, intended to make the rider secure in his place. He fastened it and felt better. He saw the roc, far below, beginning to beat upward with furious strokes of its long pinions.

He tucked away his cigarette-case and got out his two stones and the handkerchief and the full phial of *lasf*. He rearranged the stones and the phial in the handkerchief. He tied the whole together, tugging at the corners of the handkerchief with his teeth. The combination made a fairly handy if eccentric hand-grenade. But of course it could not possibly explode.

Then he watched with an unnatural calm. Just as in an airplane one has no sensation of height, so on this peculiar mount he felt as if he were in some sensational illusory ride in an amusement-park. He even examined the creature he rode, while the mountaintops grew level with him and then sank a thousand feet or more below.

"Abdul," he said. "What on earth are you, anyhow? I've never seen anything like this!"

Abdul said miserably:

"I had indigestion one night, Lord, and dreamed this. So I practised making myself into it. It has been much admired. The touch of having the creature possess no actual, visible face is considered very effective; and I—I thought at one time that Nasim was much impressed by it. But she became betrothed to Es-Souk. I think, Lord, that the form I wear might be called a chimaera."

Tony said:

"Nasim liked it, eh? . . . here comes Es-Souk! Level off, Abdul, and let him get on our tail. When he comes diving in I'll do my stuff, and when I yell you put on the heat. Get away from there fast! Understand?"

"Aye, Lord." And then Abdul wailed from that misty emptiness which was the chimaera's face, "If I ever get out of this, I will never speak so soon again! I will never offer allegiance to any other—"

THE very mountains seemed like toadstools below them. Tony could see over uncountable square miles of desert and foothills. He even thought he saw a dark smudge against the horizon which might be the oasis and the city of Barkut—

Tony felt a shadow fall upon him—the shadow of the roc, a thousand feet above. It screamed at him.

"Get set now," said Tony, between his teeth. "Ready—let's go! He's diving, Abdul!"

The roc flattened its wings, partly folding them, and came rushing down

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in a deadly plunge. Actually, Es-Souk was still at least partly bluffed. Tony had been too confident, and Es-Souk was a cagey *djinn*. He'd had one experience of hand-to-hand fighting with Tony, and he had sneezed so horribly that—knowing what he knew—he had been scared to the very last atom of his fissionable being. But since Tony was now some twelve thousand feet above ground-level, on chimaera-back, it would be possible to kill him even more surely than by tearing him limb from limb. A furious assault upon Abdul, in some tender member, should make the *djinn*-chimaera react in typical *djinn* fashion—by metamorphosis. Abdul could definitely be forced to change to something else. And if he failed of absolute presence of mind, he would forget to include Tony's saddle and safety-belt in his new shape, and Tony would thump into the desert below in a completely conclusive finish to the duel.

So the roc plunged savagely—seemingly for Tony, but intending a last-second swerve and the chewing-up of one of Abdul's chimaera-wings. In sheer self-defense Abdul must repair the damage by changing form, and—

"Brakes, Abdul!" commanded Tony. "He's not gaining fast enough!"

Abdul slowed—and the roc gained. Closer—closer—its great beak gaping. It was almost time for the swerve and the slashing attack which would send Tony plunging some two miles and more to death—

Tony shouted, "Now, Abdul! Brake hard! That'll make him overshoot—"

Abdul braked. Chimaeras are extraordinarily maneuverable creatures. Abdul seemed practically to stop short in mid-air. The roc almost crashed into him, its cavernous beak widening in awful menace.

Actually, the roc's beak was no more than twenty feet away when Tony squeezed hard on his improvised bomb, felt the glass crunch—and heaved the cloth-wrapped missile into the gaping throat. It was an excellent shot. He saw the little object go flying down the two-yard, open gullet to its maw.

"Roger!" roared Tony. "Step on it! Move!"

Then he felt as if his neck would snap off. Abdul took evasive action. It began with an outside loop that made the safety-belt creak hideously, was followed by a wing-over at the bottom, and then continued as a power-dive in which the wind went pouring into Tony's open mouth until he felt as if he were being forcibly inflated.

But even then he looked back.

The roc was motionless, as if paralyzed by some awful shock. But the paralysis lasted only for seconds. Suddenly the already huge form expanded still more. It struggled convulsively. It sneezed. In its struggling it had not stayed on an even keel. The sneeze had all the propulsive effect of a high-temperature jet. It kicked the suddenly shapeless object violently higher. It writhed. It struggled again, very horribly. It ceased to be a bird. It was impossible to say what it was! Another convulsion even more violent than the first. The almost amoeboid object shot higher—it had pseudopods now, which appeared at random and flailed aimlessly but with terrific force. A second convulsive sneeze ejected so huge a volume of air with such violence that the *djinn* was shot up a good five thousand feet.

ES-SOUK was maddened, now, with the knowledge of his doom. He went into lunatic gyrations which turned into flight straight upward. But he flew now not by wings or any motion of any members, but by the lightning-swift protrusion of a threadlike pseudopod far ahead and the equally lightning-like flowing of all his substance up to and into it, and the instant repetition of the process.

Even huge as he now was, he rose so swiftly as to dwindle as Tony watched. At ten miles altitude there was a convulsive sidewise jerking of the climbing thing. Another sneeze. He continued to shoot frantically skyward. Twenty miles

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up . . . he was probably a quarter-mile across, but he became a speck which could barely be distinguished—

Then he blew up. He must have been fifty miles high, at least. He was in the upper troposphere. And he must have weighed several hundred pounds. Perhaps not all his substance disintegrated. Even human atomic bombs do not detonate with one hundred per cent conversion of their mass into free energy. Es-Souk's efficiency as a bomb was probably less than that of purified U235 or plutonium. But the flare was colossal. There was a sensation of momentary, terrific heat. No sound, of course. The explosion took place where the air was too thin to carry sound. For the same reason there was no concussion-wave. But the flash of Es-Souk's detonation was several times brighter than the sun and a dozen times the sun's diameter.

Minutes later, Abdul came rather heavily to a landing on the desert. Tony dismounted. Abdul seemed to dissolve suddenly and run together, without any intermediate state, to restore the *djinn* to his short, swart, human form, with the turban atop his head. He was trembling.

"Lord!" he said in a shaking voice. "I did not know how terrible was your weapon! I did not know that you were so much more powerful than the most powerful of *djinns*. Indeed, Lord, I apologize for regretting that I offered my allegiance. I did not speak too soon, Lord! I did not speak soon enough! And by the beard of the Prophet, I swear that you are my king and my ruler for always!"

Tony swallowed. That flare in the midday sky had been unnerving.

"All right, Abdul," he said. "We'll let it go at that. You've been worried about protection. As far as I can, I'll give it to you—"

"Protection, Lord?" said Abdul, beaming. "It is I who will be begged for protection now! My friends who have seen Es-Souk destroyed will come to me begging me to intercede that you do not destroy them also! You will let me boast before them, Lord? After all, I was the chimaera on which you rode when you destroyed Es-Souk in such a manner that no others of the *djinn* were harmed! I did help you, to the best of my poor ability!"

"Naturally—" began Tony. Then Nasim's voice came to him.

"You carried him, Abdul," said Nasim proudly, "which is what a *djinn* should do for his king. But I played the part of a proper *djinnee*, too! I held his coat!"

Tony turned to her. He accepted the belted-in-the-back camel's-hair coat. Then he said politely:

"That was very nice of you, Nasim. I appreciate it a lot. But won't you *please* put on some clothes?"

XVI

THE palace of the *djinn* king wasn't what it had been. Not only the *djinns* officially off-duty, as it were, had attended Tony's duel with Es-Souk; guardsmen also had quietly transformed themselves from twelve-foot military figures into gazelles, whirlwinds, lions, and other swiftly-moving creatures to attend the sporting event. The court, generally, had poured out to see the ruckus. And in addition, various *djinns* serving as towers, pinnacles, rooms, articles of furniture and *virtu*, rugs, hangings, plumbing fixtures and structural elements had taken time off from supporting the state and majesty of the king.

Some of them went back to their assigned positions in the structure after it was all over, but some did not. In consequence, from the official lodging of the Queen of Barkut, the all-encircling palace looked ragged. Here an art-gallery was exposed to the blazing sunshine. There the more intimate arrangements of the *djinn* monarch's seraglio were in plain view. And the dusty, thinly grassed meadow within the palace looked like a country fairground on opening day. Some thousands of *djinns*

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milled about, in all the diverse shapes and forms their personal preferences dictated. Some talked. Some argued. A few—even at such a moment—made such romantic overtures to other members of the race of opposite gender as might have been expected. But on the whole, the several-thousand-odd *djinns* gathered beyond the Queen's vegetable gardens were there to see Tony.

He made his report to the Queen, drinking coffee in her cottage. Ghail moved about, ostensibly assisting the Queen in serving him, but actually listening avidly and looking at him from time to time with widely varying expressions.

"The devil of it is," said Tony querulously, "that instead of making me unpopular, killing Es-Souk seems to have made me something of a hero!"

The Queen nodded.

"They're like children," she said sagely. "Just like children,—or apes. Much like horses, too. *Djinns* are great fun! They make lovely pets when you understand them!"

Tony's expression lacked something of full sympathy.

"Somehow," he admitted, "just personally, you understand, I can't imagine wanting to pet a quarter-ton of fissionable material, whether it was in the form of a chimaera or a cute little moth's egg hiding in a crack until the time was ripe for conversation."

"I still don't see," said the Queen, brightly, "just how you set him off—this Es-Souk, that is. Is it a secret of the royal family of your nation?"

Tony shrugged, helplessly.

"I didn't intend to set him off," he admitted. "I did think I might pin his ears back, and with him, the king's, but I didn't anticipate an atomic explosion. But it does make sense, after a fashion. After all, when anything's put into an atomic pile it becomes radioactive, and a radioactive substance isn't immune to ordinary chemical effects. It works just like ordinary matter except for its radio-activity. So it's reasonable enough that perfectly normal, perfectly stable compounds like *lasf* would act chemically on *djinns*. The results, though—"

"Chemically?" queried the Queen. Ghail stood still, looking strangely at Tony.

"Of course," said Tony. "I had you draw me a picture of the *lasf*-leaf. Remember? And I recognized it. We have that plant in my country. We call it hogweed, or ragweed. It's a pest to some humans."

The Queen listened. Tony drank more coffee.

"Ragweed," he said. "Sneezing. You anoint your weapons with it. The *djinns* run away. Sometimes they sneeze. And I'd drunk some of the stuff the other day and that night Es-Souk tried to strangle me, and I coughed. And he sneezed. That's ragweed, all right! The pollen is worst of all. It hits some human people too. You see?"

The Queen said brightly:

"I fear not, Lord Toni."

"Ragweed; sneezing; hay-fever," explained Tony. "The *djinns* are subject to hay-fever. It's an allergy. A racial trait. Ragweed, which doesn't bother most humans, is deadly poison to them. Like DDT to bugs. It's so strong a poison that merely its odor sets them crazy. You people have been wasting the stuff. You've swabbed guns and bullets with it. It dried, and by the time you got to where you were going to fight the *djinns*, most of it was gone. They ran away from the dried, dusty remains that by pure accident stuck to your weapons. You see? That night in my bedroom I had the stuff on my breath. When I coughed, Es-Souk got a whiff of it. And I figured that if so little of it would chase him, the real stuff tossed down his throat would really go to town. And it did!"

HE LOOKED hopefully at them. But he knew no Arabic word for "allergy" or "hay-fever" or "pollen," or for "radioactive" or "fissionable" or "atomic." Even the English word "rag-

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weed" in an Arabic context did not seem to mean *lasf* to the Queen or Ghail. To the two of them, he seemed to be speaking quite sincerely about matters so erudite as to be beyond their understanding. And at that it would have taken him a week to clarify the word "allergy." They would never have understood DDT. The queen dismissed the explanation.

"Doubtless it is clear to you, Lord Toni," she observed, "but we poor women find it too involved. You speak of the magics and arts of your own nation. What shall you do now?"

Tony blinked. Then he remembered his anger.

"I'm going to see the king," he said indignantly. "He arranged that business of Es-Souk's escape, dammit! He expected to get me killed, with himself in the clear! I'm going to give him the devil! And if he acts up," he added truculently, "I'll blow on my cigarette-lighter! That will hardly set him off, but it'll scare him green!"

The Queen looked hard at Tony. Then she exchanged an astonished glance with Ghail.

"Have you looked out the door?" she asked softly.

Tony looked, and grew uncomfortable. "Do they have autograph-hunters here, too?"

Ghail said firmly, "I do not know whether you are as stupid as you pretend, but certainly you had better go out and speak to those *djinns!* They are impressed enough now!"

"Impressed?"

Ghail said exasperatedly, "Get up! Go out! Let them bow down to you! Then, if you wish, you can go to see the king!" But as he stood up with a bewildered expression, she said softly, "You are very wonderful!"

"What?" He looked incredulous, and then turned swiftly to the Queen. "Oh, yes! Ghail tells me, Majesty, that she is your personal slave and can't be sold or given without your consent. I'd—er—like to have a business conversation with you sooner or later."

Ghail stamped her foot. "Get—out!"

Tony looked incredulous again. He went reluctantly out of the door.

A bull elephant charged toward him from fifty feet away. Tony took one look and reached for his cigarette-case. Then the elephant changed smoothly into some thousands of billiard balls in red, green, blue, black and pink, which swept onward in a clacking tide of bewilderingly intricate motions upon and against each other. The balls shrank as they rolled. Then, suddenly, they jerked to a halt and into the rotund, turbanned, swaggering form of Abdul in one instant.

"Majesty!" said Abdul, beaming. "Your people are gladdened by the sight of you! Will you deign to accept their allegiance now, or will you make a more formal ceremony?"

Tony said:

"Don't talk nonsense! Look here! I was invited to this place to see the king! He tried to get me killed! I'm not pleased with him! If I've got to have an interview with him, I want to get it over with! Then I'll go back to Barkut so the truce will be ended, and come back and start tearing things up. I've a sort of obligation—"

"Majesty!" protested Abdul. "You would endanger your so-precious life by entering his presence? What would become of me if by treachery—"

Tony scowled. "I'd like to see him try something!" he said sourly. "How about showing me the way?"

He wasn't bluffing. The event of an hour or so ago, plus innumerable other oddities, had created in him a sort of fanatic disbelief in common sense. It suddenly occurred to him that his conscience hadn't said one word to him since the fight with Es-Souk. It did not seem possible that his maiden aunt's acid creation had ceased to exist—but still—

He winced.

His conscience was snarling bitingly that it was still on deck; but that his

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activities were so illimitably remote from sanity that they had no moral aspect at all. But, said his conscience—and it seemed to raise its voice—when it came to trying to make a business deal for the ownership of a poor slave-girl whose morals were demonstrably so much superior to his own—

Tony straightened up. He felt better with his conscience nagging at him. More natural.

HE MARCHED toward the palace. Abdul scuttled around before him and swaggered, waving his arms imperiously for the clearing of a way. There was a swarming of *djinns* to be close to the point of his passage. It was a singular experience for Tony to walk through the mob in a lane cleared for him as if by magic, and to feel upon himself the respectful, avid starings of so many eyes. There were animal's faces and human faces and faces that were far from either. There were birds and reptiles and quaint assemblages of unrelated parts into forms which—like Abdul's chimaera— had probably been dreamed up by their wearers of the moment. There were also three *djinnees,* side by side, still in the same female human forms they had worn the night before. They were an odd illustration of the female fondness of fashion, because the night before their forms had included the gauzy draperies of Arab dancing-girls. Now that was changed. Nasim's part in the victory over Es-Souk had been seen and noted. The three *djinnees* paid her tribute as a leader of fashion. Beaming at Tony as he passed, they displayed the new style Nasim had set among the lady *djinns*: They were, exclusively, pink skin.

Tony was very much embarrassed. But he did notice that one of the three had quite nice legs. She wasn't as bell-bottomed as most, either.

Tony and Abdul walked through the palace. There were places where there was no longer a roof. The roof-members were out in the prison-meadow where they had waited for Tony to speak to them. There were places where there were no walls. There was one spot where even all flooring had vanished, and Tony saw with some astonishment that beneath the very fabric of the royal palace of the *djinn,* there was sparse grass and sandy soil, as if this particular part of the palace had not even been in existence for very many days.

Abdul made a dignified flourish before the chasm. He leaped agilely outward into emptiness in what might have been a graceful swan-dive—and unfolded himself as a portable suspension-bridge that neatly spanned the gap. Tony walked across. He did not quite turn in time to see the process by which Abdul returned to his more normal form.

"Majesty," said Abdul blandly, "have you made your plans as yet?"

"Eh? Plans? Hm—not yet," said Tony.

"I am the first of your servants and subjects, Majesty," Abdul told him piously. "I beg you to trust in me for a time—at least until you find a better!"

Tony said impatiently;

"All right. But why do you call me Maj—"

He stopped. As he spoke, he had passed through a doorway. It was but one of dozens he had allowed Abdul to lead him through. But this was different. He had come unannounced and unwittingly into the audience-hall of the King of the *Djinn.* It was a colossal hall, some sixty feet high and perhaps six hundred feet long. Its walls blazed with all the phony grandeur the *djinns* assigned to wall-duty could imagine. It was very magnificent indeed.

THE group of *djinns* at its far end was less magnificent. There were but half a dozen of them. They were gathered timorously about one of their number, who was patently their king. And he fumbled with what Tony suddenly realized was the only actual artifact he had seen in any *djinn's* hands. It was the only accessory he had noted which

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was not a part of the *djinn* who wore or carried it.

This object was distinctly non-*djinnian*. The ancient *djinn* who clutched it jealously was plainly bewildered by it. To judge by the crown on his head and various other royal insignia, he could be none but the *djinn* king in person. And he was the first and only *djinn* Tony had ever seen who really looked old. A *djinn* looked always as old as he thought, but the King of the *Djinns* was no longer even able to think of himself as young. He was very ancient indeed, and he was hideously ugly—Tony heard later that there was a trace of *efreet* blood in him—and he fumbled querulously with an object which surely no *djinn* had ever conceived or made.

It was a device of glass and corroded bronze and other metals. The glass part of it was remarkably familiar. It was exactly the shape of one of those fluorescent-ended tubes on whose larger, coated surface an image appears in a television set. The rest of it was completely cryptic to Tony. There were coils, and there was something that could be a condenser, and there were objects which could even be batteries, in age-blackened bronze cases. But the whole was old. Unspeakably old. And, of course, batteries could not be expected to hold a charge after as many centuries as the patina on the bronze implied.

"Greeting!" said Tony sternly. He had his cigarette-lighter handy.

The *djinn* king looked up with an elderly start. Then he scowled portentously.

"Hah! The human Lord Toni," he rumbled. "You have betrayed my hospitality, human! It well for you that I am merciful! But you are my guest! Therefore I take no vengeance on you in my own house. But your camel will return you to Barkut within the hour! The truce between me and Barkut ends! I shall destroy the city and the people. I shall blot out the memory of the nation! I shall—"

Tony found his eyes hot and angry.

"Interesting! You invited me here to have me murdered because you learned that my nation isn't troubled with *djinns!* You were afraid I might lead Barkut to security! But your planned murder backfired, so now you'll try the same thing openly!" Then he bluffed. "And how do you propose to destroy Barkut? You have seen what I can do!"

THE *djinn* king glowered at Tony. With somehow the air of one changing costume to a more appropriate garb, he swelled to a greater size. Tusks appeared between his lips. His complexion became a ghastly blue. Horns showed on his head. The armor which appeared at the same time was tastefully decorated with human skulls. But he still looked old. And Tony felt that he was uneasy.

"Human!" he roared. "See you this thing in my hands? It is the great treasure of the *djinn* crown! With this have my *djinns* been kept subject! With this will I destroy Barkut and the snivelling traitors who bow to you! Know you what this is?"

Tony had a hunch amounting to conviction that the *djinn* king had been puzzling over the device when he entered. He had plainly no great knowledge either of machinery or electronics. Tony had not much more. But he simply could not believe that any device of such great age could still be in working order. He bluffed again.

"Of course I know what it is!" he said scornfully. "Every low drinking-place in my nation has one! You look in the large end of the tube!"

Speaking of the device as a television-set, Tony spoke with strict truthfulness. But he felt the jerking tension in the *djinns* about the king grow suddenly less. The king himself relaxed visibly.

"Ho!" rumbled the king zestfully. "That was a matter I knew! I knew that! Ha! I but tested you to see if you truly know this device. Then you know that with it pointed at a rebellious *djinn* or a human city, at any distance I may create explosions beside

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which the destruction of Es-Souk is as the glow of a firefly!"

The other elderly *djinns* about him laughed uproariously. Their mirth was almost hysterically relieved. It sounded as if the *djinn* king had not known which was the business end of the gadget. He had been trying helplessly to figure out how to aim it. And Tony had told them.

"Go you back to Barkut," bellowed the king gleefully. "Tell the humans there that from my palace I shall destroy them all!"

Tony knitted his brows. He felt cold prickles up and down his spine. He couldn't believe the thing would work, as old as it was. But the *djinns* ought to know! So he said distastefully:

"From your palace? With its walls of *djinns?*" He remembered Abdul's weeping gratitude out on the sand, after the duel was over, because only Es-Souk had perished. "Remember what will happen if by accident you destroy a *djinn* nearby! I do not advise you to use that device. Besides, consider how much more deadly is mine!"

He snapped open the cigarette-lighter. He blew gently on the wick. The faint fragrance of *lasf*. . . .

There was instant, howling panic. Abdul flashed out the door by which he and Tony had entered. The king and his councillors fled in tumult. Even the floor of the audience-hall heaved and melted away, and Tony tumbled some four or five feet to the ground. He was abruptly in the open air with the palace dissolving all about him and whirlwinds darting away in crazy flight in every direction.

Farthest, and fleeing fastest, seemed to be the king.

But the *djinn* king had not dropped his gadget. Tony hunted anxiously all around. He didn't believe it could work, but still—

He worried about it as he walked gloomily back toward the mud cottage where the Queen and Ghail were quartered.

It shouldn't work. It positively was too old to work! But if it did—

XVII

THEY started back for Barkut in a state wholly unlike the fashion of their arrival at the *djinn* palace. Abdul arranged the march. He seemed to delight in devising elaborate ceremonies. The parade began with dragons, sixty feet long and breathing fire. After them marched a troop of giants carrying very knobbly maces seemingly of iron, which should have weighed tons. Then a vast, long column of *djinn* camels, each camel the customary twenty feet tall and with an impressive pack-load of unstable *djinn* riches, the whole draped with cloth-of-gold and similar stuff. Then *djinn* soldiers, looking remarkably ferocious. Tony and Ghail and the Queen rode in a colossal litter carried between two elephants. It was extremely luxurious, and the only incongruous note was that the Queen had packed a picnic lunch for the journey in crude earthen pots. They were covered over with seed-pearl brocades, however, and did not show.

Such ostentation had not been Tony's own idea. Abdul had presented himself fearfully at the Queen's cottage, almost half an hour after the use of *lasf* in the audience-chamber.

"Majesty!" said Abdul reproachfully, "If you detonate me, who am the most abject of your subjects, how will the government go on?"

"Government?" Tony stared. "What government?"

"Of the *djinn*," said Abdul, more reproachfully still. "You are my king, Majesty. You are also king of these others who wait to swear allegiance. And there must be government!"

"Hold on!" Tony cried. "What's this? What have I got to do with government? How'd I get to be a king?"

"Majesty!" Abdul waved his hands. He had changed his costume, now, and appeared in garments which were exclusively seed-pearls with ruby and

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emerald buttons. His turban emitted a slight and graceful plume of smoke, which looked incendiary but—he had explained—was quite safe under all ordinary conditions. "Majesty, it is simple! You, a human, defeated Es-Souk in single combat, hand-to-hand. This was in the night in Barkut. Such a thing has never before happened in the history of the *djinn*. Today you fought a duel with Es-Souk and detonated him so that no other of the *djinn* folk was even harmed. Only the king of the *djinn* has ever been able to destroy a *djinn*. It has been a thousand years since even our kings have had to resort to this measure, and on the last three occasions—going back more than two thousand years—in each case numerous other *djinns* died in the holocaust of the execution. And before my own eyes and many others you caused the former king and his councillors to flee and a part of his palace to dissolve. You are, therefore, more powerful than any *djinn*, you are more merciful than any king of the *djinn* in the past, and you are victor in a personal contest with the king we had this morning. Therefore you are the king!"

"The logic is elaborate," said Tony suspiciously, "but it isn't air-tight."

"Majesty," repeated Abdul firmly, "you can destroy any of us, or you can spare any of us. Therefore we obey you. And therefore you are the king. It cannot be helped."

The Queen of Barkut looked at him, smiling.

"Obviously," she said brightly. "Abdul is quite right. And you can end my captivity if you wish. What rewards we poor humans of Barkut can offer you—"

Tony looked sharply at Ghail. She flushed hotly.

"All right," said Tony. "So I'm the king. Do we have a civil war, or is my authority unanimously accepted?"

"It is almost unanimous, Majesty," said Abdul, beaming. "It may be necessary to detonate the former king. That, however, is not yet certain. He has fled with a few of his councillors. They feel that you have a prejudice against them—"

"Intelligent of them," grunted Tony. "Very well, then! The first thing is to get Ghail and the Queen back to Barkut. Then we'll start fresh from there. Do you want to arrange matters?"

"For what else," asked Abdul blandly, "did your Majesty make me your grand visier?"

HE BOWED to the ground and vanished. The parade formed almost immediately after. It set out across the desert with the celerity of *djinn* traffic. The elephant-litter maintained a forty-mile speed principally because the elephants were nearly five storeys tall. Whirlwinds went on before, spreading out as scouts on all sides, and overhead some dozens of rocs cruised at different altitudes for an air-umbrella against possible attack by the former king and his half-dozen malcontents. It was all quite preposterous. The elephant-litter itself was the size of an eight-room house and actually contained two floors and different compartments on each floor. The Queen sat gracefully underneath the canopy on the sun-deck on top. Ghail sat beside her; her lips tightly compressed. Despite the speed of their journeying, the litter was hot. Ghail, however, remained wrapped up in all the voluminous wrappings of a respectable woman during travel.

"Listen!" said Tony. "Aren't you hot?"

"I'll do," said Ghail composedly.

"As a slave," said Tony, "the Queen can give you permission to make yourself comfortable. Why not?"

Ghail regarded him ominously. But the Queen said:

"He's right, my dear. Why don't you slip out of that dreadfully hot cloak?"

"He," said Ghail in even tones, "is very fond of looking at legs. My legs, or anybody else's legs. And he hasn't any *djinnees* with him to sit around like the hussies they are—for instance, that *djin-*

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nee who held his coat while he fought Es-Souk! So he is unhappy!" Then she flared out at Tony. "Why don't you get another litter for yourself? All you have to do is command it! Or we'll get out of this litter and ride on camels, and you can have as many *djinnees* around you as you want! You can—"

Tony scowled. "If you're thinking of Nasim . . . wait a minute!"

He stood up and went to the rail of the gently swaying sun-deck. Alongside, a few hundred yards away, a smaller litter kept pace with this. That was the traveling-carriage of Abdul, who had explained blandly that as grand vizier to Tony who was king of the *djinn,* a certain amount of state for himself was desirable. But Abdul's litter was merely carried by two thirty-foot camels, and the litter slung between them was no larger than the cabin of an eight-passenger plane. It was suitably less stately than Tony's equipage. When Tony bellowed at it, its interior was completely hidden by silken draperies.

"Abdul!" roared Tony.

THE thirty-foot camels intelligently swerved to bring Abdul's litter close. And even so soon, Abdul had attuned himself to react instantly to a call in Tony's voice. Instantly the drapes were torn aside. Abdul beamed across the space between litters.

But for half a breath Tony did not recognize him. Abdul swaggered, of course—but that was part of his personality. It was his form which was strangely, unfamiliarly familiar. He was, in fact, a duplicate of Tony. He wore exact facsimiles of Tony's soft felt hat, his belted-in-the-back camel's-hair topcoat, and undoubtedly his feet were encased in duplicates of Tony's brown shoes. But the face was still the face of Abdul, and it beamed.

Behind him, in the litter, Nasim also beamed at Tony.

"Majesty!" cried Abdul happily. "What is your will?"

Tony stared—and inspiration struck.

"That is Nasim, isn't it?" he demanded.

"Yes, Majesty," called Nasim archly. She came and stood beside Abdul. "Look! Doesn't he look just like you? Isn't he wonderful?"

Tony said sternly:

"It was my thought that I had not yet rewarded Nasim for her aid in the fight with Es-Souk. I see that she has chosen her reward. It is my will that the two of you marry!"

Nasim giggled. Abdul bowed so low that he almost fell out of the litter.

"To hear is to obey, Majesty!"

"And it is also my will," said Tony severely, "that if at any time in the future Nasim comes into my presence, she must have some clothes on! After all, I'm human!"

"Aye, Majesty!" said Abdul. Nasim coyly pulled a drape about herself.

"That's all!" said Tony.

He turned his back. The camel-litter swerved away. The Queen seemed to be trying to stifle laughter. Ghail looked utterly infuriated.

"Well?" said Tony.

"If the Queen," said Ghail furiously, "commands that I sacrifice my modesty to the King of the *Djinn,* so that he can see if he wishes to purchase me—"

Tony said just as angrily:

"Hold on! I haven't talked business to the Queen, yet! But I'll talk it now!" He turned to the much-amused Queen. "Majesty, I understand that I'm the King of the *Djinns.* Most of the riches I'm supposed to have are fake, as you know. But if there aren't any real riches, I'll make these *djinns* of mine work until there are! And I'll pay you any sum you care to name if you'll set Ghail free so she won't be a slave any longer!"

His conscience spoke approvingly. Tony snarled at it.

The Queen almost choked on her laughter. Ghail's face went blank. She stared incredulously at Tony.

"And—and then what?" asked the Queen.

"Then," said Tony doggedly, "I'll try

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to persuade her to marry me. It isn't that I'm too damned moral, but I don't think I'd like bought kisses, however legal the transaction might be in this country."

"And—and if she would not marry you?" asked the Queen.

Tony looked at Ghail. Her face was crimson, and though there was no perceptible softening in her expression, her eyes showed distinct satisfaction.

"If she wouldn't marry me," said Tony shrewdly, "then—I guess I'd have to take an interest in music. After all, I understand that Esir and Esim have pretty good voices."

The satisfaction vanished from Ghail's expression. Fury came back.

"I thought," she observed in detached scorn, "that you would not care for purchased kisses."

"But I didn't buy Esir and Esim," said Tony. "They were gifts! That's different!"

Then he ducked. A dark shadow flashed past overhead, so close that it seemed almost to touch the sun-deck. It was the monstrous body of a roc, soaring swiftly downward from the sky. It touched ground almost directly before the leading elephant, shivered, and became a twelve-foot *djinn* in what was probably the *djinnian* air-force uniform. He raced toward the elephant-litter.

"Majesty!" he bellowed. "Enemy *djinns* sighted overhead! Closing fast!"

TONY reacted swiftly. He bellowed for Abdul and roared for a ladder. Instead, the gigantic trunk of the rear elephant swung around and held itself invitingly ready. Tony scrambled onboard. Abdul bounced out of his litter in a wild leap, turned into something unusual on the way to the earth, and landed with a splashing of sand. He arose, himself again.

"Majesty!" he said, beaming. "The chimaera form for this conflict?"

"And make it snappy!" Tony rasped. "I don't think anything drastic can happen, but—"

Abdul puffed out into the snaky creation of his nightmare, with its face of mist. There was the saddle as before. Tony climbed into it and buckled the safety-belt.

"Go ahead!" he commanded.

There was a sensation of almost unbearable acceleration and he rode upward into the blue.

At five thousand feet they passed the first flight of rocs. The great birds wheeled aside to make room for them and then craned their necks to watch. At ten thousand feet Abdul and Tony passed the second line of air-defense. From this height Tony could distinctly see the oasis and the gleaming white walls of Barkut. Still the chimaera hurtled skyward. At fifteen thousand feet the ceiling squadron of rocs was left behind.

Abdul turned his temporarily snaky neck about and said triumphantly:

"Majesty! They flee! From us!"

Now Tony saw the *djinn* king and his few faithful councillors. They were not recognizable as such, of course. With the chimaera climbing vengefully toward them, they had adopted the emergency measures Es-Souk's last frenzies had led to: They were now mere shapeless objects which flew straight up with lightning-like amoeboid movements. They expanded as the air grew thinner and they needed to act upon greater surfaces for support. But they went up and up and up—

Tony was relieved. He had only one full phial of *lasf*, and he was highly doubtful that he could duplicate his trick of the fight with Es-Souk. Certainly he couldn't handle half a dozen *djinns* with one improvised bomb, and if they attacked with any resolution at all—

The air grew thin as the chimaera climbed. Tony found himself panting for breath.

"Easy, Abdul!" he gasped. "No higher! This is enough!"

The chimaera leveled off. Tony's heart pounded horribly because of the lack of

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oxygen at this height. He felt dizzy. He sucked in great gulps of the unsatisfying thin stuff. Then he heard Abdul saying appreciatively:

"Pardon, Majesty! I had forgotten that even you will not wish to be too close to your enemies when they explode!"

XVIII

TONY could not answer. The way to live at great heights is not to exert yourself and to breathe fast and deep. He busied himself with getting his breath. Presently he felt a little better. A little, not much. The horizon had broadened for hundreds of miles, it seemed. He saw the halted *djinn*-caravan far below. It looked like a short length of string on a sand-colored blanket. But overhead, the climbing, writhing *djinns*—the ex-king and those who still obeyed him—were such tiny motes that, strain his eyes as he would, he lost them.

He understood. Not only was his own weapon mysterious to the *djinn*, so that even Abdul expected him to strike down the fugitives from afar, but there was an even more rational reason for this long climb. Es-Souk, exploding at a fifty-mile altitude, had dimmed the sun and given off a momentarily intolerable heat. If the former king believed that the human-made apparatus Tony had seen would detonate his rebellious subjects at a distance, he must expect a much more terrible cataclysm below. He would get as far away as possible, though he had still to remain in atmosphere for support.

The chimaera soared in huge, easy circles. Abdul said inquiringly:

"Majesty? They have not exploded."

"I—can't see them," said Tony absurdly.

He clung to his saddle, panting. Staying up here was a bluff, while he clung to two possible hopes. Perhaps the *djinn* king could not make the ancient weapon work—that was Tony's first hope. If nothing happened at all, he would go on down and explain that he had made the former king powerless, and now spared his life. The second hope was fainter. The instrument had bewildered its possessor. The king actually hadn't known which end was which. And Tony had told him quite truthfully, as far as television was concerned, that one looked in the large end of such tubes as the conical glass object he saw. Now, gasping for breath, he hoped very fervently that his advice would be taken, and that it would be bad. He recalled very vaguely that a television-tube works because it shoots a beam of electrons from the small end against the large end. If the antique instrument worked in anything like the same fashion, whatever detonated *djinns* would come out of the large end, too. And if the *djinn* king happened to be looking into that end when he turned on the instrument. . . .

Very high and far away, it seemed that the heavens burst. One splash of awful flame flashed into being, not directly overhead but near the horizon. The fugitives had not only put themselves as high as possible—a hundred miles, perhaps—but had gone other hundreds of miles to one side so that as much sheer distance as they could manage would lie between them and the inferno they expected to create.

The first flash only dwindled when there was a second, and then two more, and then three. They went off soundlessly, but like firecrackers set off by the same fuse. And very high up indeed, in the icy chill of the heights, Tony found himself unbearably hot. Six or seven *djinns* breaking down in atomic explosions, even at two or three hundred miles distance, make for high-temperature effects. And Tony knew, then, that the apparatus which would destroy *djinns* had been blown to atoms along with the atoms it had blown up. The *djinn* king had, after all, been looking into the muzzle of an atomic gun when he pulled its trigger to destroy his subjects.

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Abdul said happily:

"You found them, Majesty! Now none will question your right to reign!"

Without orders, he began a swift, slanting descent. In the thicker air, Tony's feelings of weakness ceased. But something else occurred to him. He reflected gloomily that nothing ever happens just right. No achievement is completely satisfying. Each one creates new worries and new troubles.

At five thousand feet, Abdul said:

"Majesty!"

"What?" asked Tony.

"You will marry the Queen of Barkut?" asked Abdul. "It seems the logical thing to do. May I begin to make plans for the wedding, Majesty?"

"Marry the Queen?" Tony shook his head. His new apprehensions hit him hard. "No! I'm not thinking of the Queen when I worry about what the gamma rays from those explosions may have done to me! Not a bit of it! I'm thinking of somebody else entirely!"

XIX

THE arrival of the *djinn* caravan created terror in Barkut. Practically the whole *djinn* nation—Tony learned that he had something over a hundred thousand subjects—came steaming out of the vastness which was the desert. The whirlwind scouts were sighted from the city walls. The aircraft curtain of rocs was sighted at the same time. When the caravan deployed before the city walls, fires of sulphurous material burned on the battlements, the city's last supply of *lasf* had been served out, and the people of Barkut were prepared to defend themselves to the last drop of ragweed solution.

There were the same people who only one day before had fired off cannon and danced in the streets to celebrate the defeat of a single *djinn* in Tony's bedroom. Now, prepared for destruction, when they learned that the *djinns* came not for conquest but as a guard of honor for the returned Queen of Barkut, that the Lord Toni who had gone away with only one slave-girl for company had returned as King of the *Djinns*, there was no possible way to express their enthusiasm.

Abdul, bustling about, supervised the instant erection of a palace for Tony's lodging. It was simple enough, of course. He had merely to sketch the outline of a modest little overnight hut of some two hundred and forty rooms with floors of alternating gold and ivory squares, windows of sapphire and emerald and ruby, and a roof of jade and silver bearing fountains that sprayed milk, wine, honey, and diamond dust. Some three hundred *djinns* apportioned the structure among themselves, transformed themselves into the necessary sections and decorations, and the thing was done. It was waiting for Tony when he came back from his visit to the city of Barkut.

"Majesty!" said Abdul happily. "We were worried that you might not be adequately served in Barkut. You should at least have let a few hundred of your servants go before you with golden basins filled with jewels and the like."

"I am," said Tony, "a person of simple tastes. I came back mainly to give orders for tight discipline in the *djinn* camp tonight. I don't want anybody sneaking into the human town. No matter how innocently, no matter how inconspicuously! Nobody is to wander in as a little centipede. Nobody is to be a little beetle or a fly or a grease-spot or a moth's egg. The human city is off-limits! Understand?"

"Yes, Majesty!" said Abdul. "And you will return—?"

"I sleep in Barkut," said Tony firmly. "There are some negotiations to be made. I'm quite safe. Hm . . . have you talked to Nasim about your marriage?"

"Yes, Majesty." Here Abdul wore the expression of a cat completely filled with cream and canaries. "We are quite agreed. Er . . . Majesty, you are not offended that I wore a costume and form resembling yours for—ah—courtship?"

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"As long as you wear that form strictly in private," said Tony. "For the admiration of nobody but Nasim, and as long as you keep Nasim from bothering me, it's all right. Why don't you get married tonight?"

"To hear is to obey, Majesty!"

"You can use the palace I won't be sleeping in, for a honeymoon cottage," said Tony enthusiastically. "If you like, I'll bring the Queen and her court out for the wedding!"

"Your Majesty is too good!" protested Abdul ecstatically.

"Then it's settled—" and Tony paused to say apprehensively, "You'll see that Nasim wears clothes while she's in human form?"

"Yes, Majesty," Abdul beamed. "May I ask about your Majesty's plans for this evening?"

"There's a banquet," said Tony, frowning, "and your wedding. And—the negotiations. If the negotiations are successful, I shall be engaged to be married and my plans are none of your business."

"It is unthinkable," Abdul assured him, "that your Majesty's desires should be opposed by any creature under the sky! But in such an impossible event—"

"Music—" said Tony glumly. "And in that case my plans are even less of your business! But remember, Barkut is off-limits for *djinns!*"

Abdul bowed to the ground.

TONY went back into the city. It was very pleasant to have all the people smile at him joyously. It was not too uncomfortable to have the men bow to him, at once respectfully and with the joy of human beings who feel a share in the feat of another human who has become King of the *Djinns*. It wasn't bad having large, lustrous eyes look warmly at him over traditional Moslem women's veils. And there was a melancholy satisfaction in going back to his old quarters in the palace—though he had occupied them only one night—to find Esir and Esim waiting for him in the most incredible excitement. They kissed him soundly.

"Indeed, Lord—Your Majesty," said Esir, laughing, "you cannot protest, because by custom any slave may kiss her master when he performs a feat so that she gives thanks to Allah that she belongs to him and no other! King of the *Djinns*, no less! Tell me, are the *djinnees* beautiful?"

"Do you think you will prefer them to us?" asked Esim anxiously. "Indeed, Lord—Your Majesty, we heard the news but an hour since, and we are fearful that you will not wish to keep us!"

Tony looked at them with a gloomy satisfaction.

"Things could be worse," he said. "For a little while I cannot tell you my plans, but whatever they turn out to be, I will bear you in mind. Oh, definitely I will bear you in mind! *Nil desperandum* will be my motto."

A tentative knock came at the door. They untangled themselves reluctantly from his embrace. It was a male slave.

"Majesty, the Queen of Barkut begs your attendance in the throne room."

"Coming up," said Tony with a sigh. To the two girls he said in comforting dejection, "I'm afraid I'll be right back."

He followed the slave to the great throne-room he had seen once before, with the decrepit Council of Regency in session. The black marble floor was the same, and the brass zodiacal signs sunk into it. It occurred to Tony that life would be wearing in a house of which all interior and exterior features were subject to change without notice. There would be other disadvantages, too.

The great throne was occupied, now. The Queen sat on it. Soldiers in baggy trousers, wearing slippers and carrying flintlock guns, regarded Tony with the affection of men who have expected to fight a losing battle against the *djinns*, and now find that they can stay comfortably at home with their families. The courtiers of Barkut regarded him with no less approval. The Queen sat

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composed and non-committal on her throne.

"Majesty," said the Queen sedately, as Tony came to a stop before her, "we wish to offer you the thanks of the humans of Barkut for our liberation, and for the liberation of the nation from the fear of the *djinns*. We wish to express our admiration and our affection. We wish to ask if there is anything which it is in our power to do, which will add to your satisfaction or happiness."

Tony looked uneasily around. He did not see Ghail.

"I told you today, in the litter," he said awkwardly, "that if by any means I could secure the freedom of the slave-girl Ghail, that I would wish to do that. If you will make her no longer a slave—"

THE Queen nodded toward a side door. It opened. Two male slaves escorted Ghail to the dais before the throne. She was very pale. The Queen addressed her gently:

"His Majesty the King of the *Djinns* has asked your freedom as the price of his aid to us. He desires also to marry you."

Ghail's lips moved a little, but she did not look at Tony.

"Majesty," said the Queen, to him, "we can refuse you nothing. I make the slave-girl Ghail free on one condition. If she does not marry you, she becomes again a slave. You would not impose that condition, but we can do no less!"

"But dammit—" began Tony indignantly.

"I—I can have no choice," said Ghail almost inaudibly. "I—I will marry him."

But she looked bitterly resigned. Tony bent over to her. She turned her face away. He whispered urgently:

"Damn it! Go through with it! I'll divorce you before we leave this hall. As I understand it, all that's necessary is for me to say 'I divorce you' three times and the trick's done!"

She jerked her head about to look at him, her eyes wide. Then she flushed.

"Your hands?" said the Queen briskly. "The *cadi* is here. He will marry you now. At once. Immediately!"

A venerable figure pushed his way forward. The ceremony began. Ghail was very quiet, but her voice was firm. The formula was strange to Tony, and he did not know when it was finished—

But suddenly it was—and the Queen was laughing delightedly!

"Now, then! Majesty, the people of Barkut have been told only since my return that I am not their real queen! When I was kidnapped by the King of the *Djinns* he believed me the queen, and Ghail yonder was but a child. I am actually Ghail's aunt, and it seemed best to pose as the ruler of Barkut lest I be strangled and Ghail herself kidnapped and subjected to the *djinn* king's demands. A child might have been frightened into obedience. I—was otherwise.

"And so, while I posed as a captive Queen, Ghail remained among her people in disguise, learning the duties of queenship and also coming to know her people as few rulers do. The Council of Regency took its commands from her. And now that the King of the *Djinns* is also our friend and moreover a human being, it is right and fitting and proper that she return to her throne. And the kingdom of the *djinns* and the human kingdom of Barkut is now one nation, and there is now no reason for battle or anything but peace and joy."

Cannon began to boom outside. There was uproar. The audience-hall itself filled with noise. And as Tony stood utterly stupefied, the erstwhile Queen stood up and beckoned to Ghail. And Ghail held Tony's hand fast and pulled him after her as she mounted to her throne. She pulled him firmly down beside her on it. It was a close fit, though not quite as close as the fit in the camel-cabin, and it felt very pleasant.

The noise still continued. Presently Tony, still dazed, whispered into Ghail's ear:

"But—you didn't have to do it this

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way! If you were willing to marry me, why didn't you just tell me so?"

Ghail smiled composedly down at the cheering people in the throne-room. She said fiercely, under her breath:

"We'd have been engaged, and it might have been weeks before we got married! And do you think I'd trust you another night in any *djinn* palace with all those hussies trying to gain your favors since you're their king? Or do you think I'd trust you with Esir and Esim either?"

Tony said feebly:

"Oh-h-h . . ." And then he said, "I—I'll have to send them word I won't be home tonight."

Then he cheered up as the celebration began.

XX

IT WAS late. The royal bridal party had graciously attended the *djinn* wedding of Nasim and Abdul in the palace outside the city walls. They had returned. Cannon still boomed. There were bonfires in the streets, and dancing, and joy was being expressed in all possible fashions, including the indecorous.

But in the royal palace of Barkut the last chamberlain bowed out, the last slave-in-waiting departed, and Tony closed the door firmly. He said:

"Er—Ghail, did I remember to send word to Esir and Esim that I wouldn't be home tonight?"

"Whether you did or not," Ghail told him, "I did!"

He took out his cigarette-case. He snapped it open. He began to prowl about the bridal chamber, blowing on the wick. A faint but perceptible aroma of *lasf* became noticeable. Ghail watched him, uncomprehending and embarrassed.

"Why do you do that, Tony?" she asked.

"Oh, it's a sort of custom in my country," said Tony awkwardly. "We don't use *lasf*, of course. We use something else. It keeps away flies and mosquitos. But I'm using this to keep away *djinns*."

Ghail smiled, and waited.

* * * * *

It was again night. Tony Gregg got out of a taxicab on Lower East Broadway, in the Syrian quarter of New York, and paid off the driver. He helped a very pretty girl to the sidewalk and led her into a *shishkebab* restaurant. The slick-haired proprietor grinned at him as he came to take his order.

"I remember you!" he said. "Mr. Emurian wanted to buy that gold-piece you had! He offered you two thousan' bucks. Ain't that right?"

"That's right," said Tony. "Have you seen him lately?"

"Oh, sure!" said the proprietor. "He comes in most every night . . . hey! Here he comes now!"

The girl with Tony had listened, frowning in attention to the difficult English words. She looked up sharply as the bald-headed man with the impeccably tailored clothes entered. He spoke pleasantly to the proprietor, glanced at Tony, and then came quickly to his table.

"Good-evening!" he said warmly, twinkling through his eyeglasses. "I have hoped to find you again! I cabled my friend in Ispahan, and he is willing to pay you three thousand dollars for your coin!"

Tony reached in his pocket. He put down two gold-pieces.

"Here are two of them," he said. "Send them to your friend as gifts. I had rather hoped to see you again, too." He slipped into the Arabic he had learned from Ghail. "This is my wife." To Ghail he explained, "This is Mr. Emurian. You have heard me speak of him."

"Oh, yes!" said Ghail. She smiled sweetly. "Tony is so grateful to you. And I also."

"Yes," said Tony. "I went to Barkut, you see. Met my wife there. In a sense, all due to you. And she wanted to see

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my world, so we came back here. —I've a rather interesting business proposition for you. I'd like to have your friend make some contact with us in Barkut and establish a branch of his business there. It would be useful to have a regular commercial contact with this world and with the United States."

The bald-headed Mr. Emurian sat down slowly, his face a study.

"You say that you went to Barkut?"

"Oh, yes," said Tony briskly. "Hm . . . maybe I'd better sketch it out."

He gave the spectacled man a brief, hasty, and necessarily improbable account of what had happened to him since their last meeting in this same restaurant.

"The *djinns*," he concluded, "have some bad qualities, but their main trouble was that they could be anything they wanted, so they never learned how to make anything. I came back to get designs and pictures of all sorts of stuff. Not only statues and fashions and architecture—though I want those—but industrial products, and—" he paused—"the machines that make them. After all, a *djinn* can turn himself into a drill-press as well as a beetle or a whirlwind, once he knows what a drill-press is like. As a drill-press he can turn out all sorts of stuff—including another drill-press. And that manner of working would be congenial to them, too. They'll like being pieces of machinery and turning out things the humans can't make and are delighted to buy from them. Barkut ought to become a rather thriving industrial community before long."

Mr. Emurian simply stared, batting his eyes slowly from time to time.

"I'd like to have your friend set up a branch of his business in Barkut," said Tony earnestly. "And—well—I'd like a great deal to get an agent here in the United States, forwarding samples of new products, technical magazines, and above all pictures of everything under the sun. You could get them to Ispahan to be brought into Barkut by whatever route your friend discovers—if you'd take the agency. Could I interest you?"

Mr. Emurian said:

"Yes. Indeed you interest me. Oh, indeed yes!"

"You work out the details," said Tony. "I'm staying at the Waldorf with my wife. I brought back quite a sum in gold, and can arrange for you to draw on it. You make your plans and get your friend to arrange to get in touch with me when he finds a way to Barkut. I'll have him watched for there, and he can locate me easily enough!"

"Indeed he can!" said Ghail proudly. "My husband is His Most Illustrious Majesty, the Great in Single Combat, the Destroyer of Evil, the Protector of the Poor, the Nobly Forgiving and Compassionate, the King of Djinns and Men, Tony Gregg!"

"Yes," said Tony abstractedly, "he can find me."

Mr. Emurian turned over the two golden coins Tony had put on the table. And suddenly his fingers trembled a little. On one side was an inscription in conventionalized Arabic script. It said that the coin was a ten-dirhim piece of Barkut. The other side showed a rather elaborate throne. But it was not empty. It was occupied by two people. One—the girl—was in some native dress of considerable grandeur, and Mr. Emurian looked twice at her. The dark-eyed, proudly smiling girl beside Tony in the *shishkebab* restaurant had plainly been the model for that figure. But he looked three times, and four, and five, at the male figure on the coin. That half of the design was a young man in a soft hat and a belted-in-the-back topcoat, with undoubtedly highly polished brown shoes. It was, in fact, Tony Gregg.

"I—will be most happy to be your American agent," said Mr. Emurian. "Er—Your Majesty!"

IT WAS later. Much later. Tony was in his pajamas in their hotel suite.

"It's funny," said Tony thoughtfully, as Ghail looked out a window at the lighted ways and skyscrapers of New

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York. "It's funny that my conscience doesn't seem to bother me any more. You remember I told you about it?"

He was sipping a final highball. Ghail stared almost affrightedly at the incredible panorama before her—a city ten miles long, with millions of bright lights, with mechanisms moving swiftly along its streets, with moving electric signs everywhere and even floating overhead to the sound of motors.

"I know, Tony," said Ghail, not turning around.

"Maybe it's dead," said Tony humorously. "It used to bother me a lot."

Then his conscience spoke. Startlingly. It said smugly that it was very well satisfied with Tony, and that he could be sure that his contentment was the result of its approval. He was very normally married, he was so far reasonably faithful to his wife—though he had turned around twice, today, to look at nylon-stockinged legs—and he had become a thriving young executive.

Tony denied it indignantly. But he was! said his conscience complacently. He was the executive head of the joint kingdom of *djinns* and men of Barkut, and he was arranging for the gradual introduction of an American standard of civilization. Eventually there would be electric refrigerators, nylon stockings, fertilizer, radio, and bubble gum in Barkut. It would be the result of Tony's executive action. And he was young. So he was a young executive. So his conscience was pleased with him, and he should feel the greatest happiness possible to man, because of his conscience's approval. "Not dead," said Tony grimly, "but merely sleeping."

Ghail turned from the window.

"Tony," she said, just a little bit unhappy, "I'm homesick! This world of yours is so big! So tremendous! There are so many people! I will stay here if you wish it—"

"I think," said Tony, "we can start back day after tomorrow. All right?"

She smiled at him, warmly. He put down his glass and stood up. He put his arms around her.

"But there's one thing," he observed comfortably, "that you can't beat this world for! Ten million people all around you may be daunting, but there's one thing we've got here that we can never be sure of in Barkut! Here, my dear, we've got privacy!"

He reached up and turned off the light. • • •

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"It's an endless table," Jody broke out

THE GREAT IDEA

IN adapting itself to life on the alien planets it seems probable that mankind will undergo some drastic changes. The late Olaf Stapledon hinted at some of them in his famous Interplanetary Man lecture. To exist in alien atmospheres Stapledon insisted that humanity was going to have to indulge in highly selective breeding, perhaps even in controlled mutation.

This may well prove true prophecy—for who can tell just what will happen to the so-called form divine in the process of adjusting to methane atmospheres or radioactive front lawns? However, there is one human quality which we feel safe in prophesying will remain unchanged. This is the same quality so rejoiced in by every scoundrel who ever trimmed a sucker since the first cave man was euchred out of his cliffside residence.

For the power to dream while waking that will ultimately carry men to the distant planets is no more than the obverse of the wishful thinking that makes them cheerful dupes in every confidence game ever known. Mr. Gallun, in this story, points out the immutability of human suckerdom. —*THE EDITOR.*

JODY and I are idealistic-romantics. Call us professional chance-takers—but never crooks. Jody was even a

Lou Hamlin Was the Ideal Sucker with that

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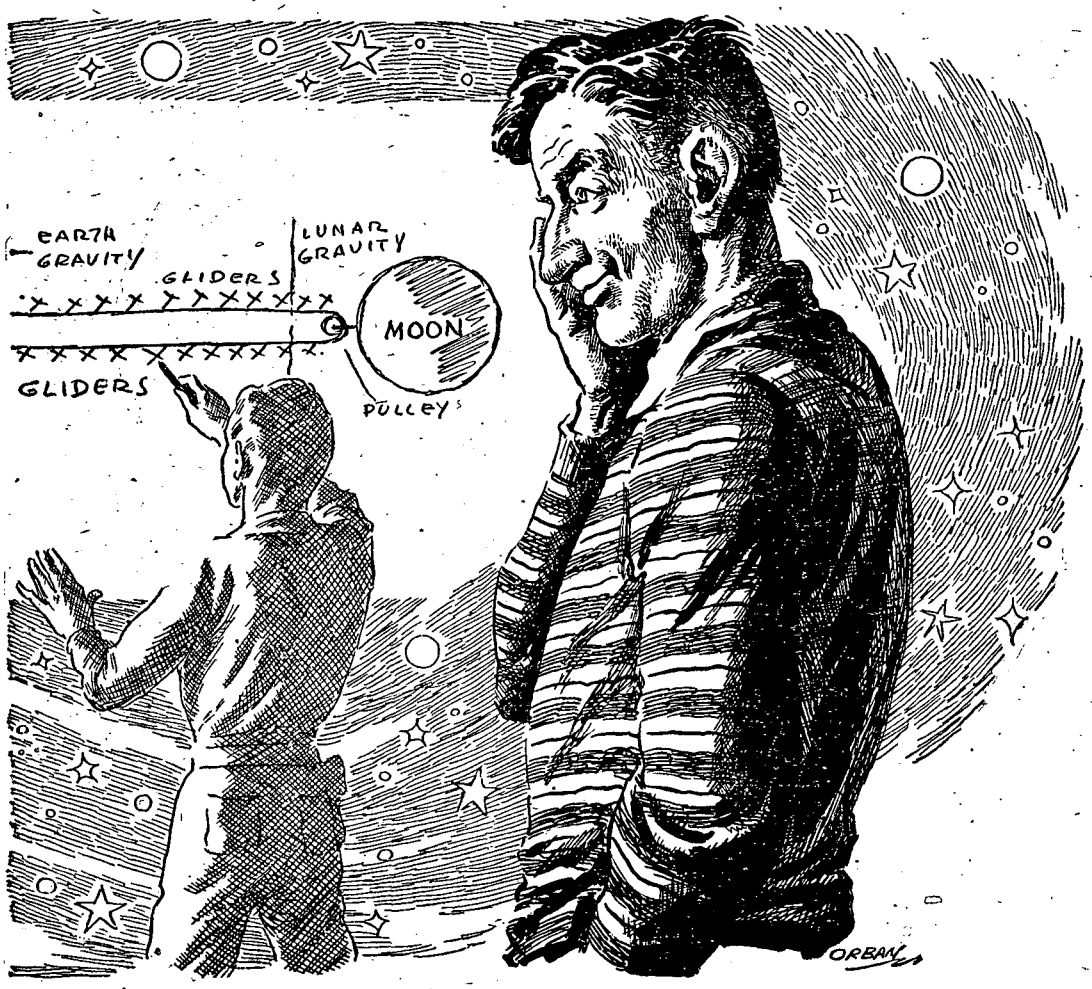

By RAYMOND Z. GALLUN

minister's son. Yet the Moon is a harsh place. Sometimes the pressure of survival becomes very great. Putting a sucker wise can be a kindness. But there is temptation to seek wicked personal benefit.

We'd been cadging handouts in Luna City for quite a while—the ancient routine on any frontier after another wrong guess. It's bad for a man's pride and character. And they can bill you ten bucks a day just for the manufactured air you breathe under the municipal atmosphere dome.

We were in the Dead Rocket Bar again, looking over the mob for prospects. And Jody was still reminding me, "Gotta get us a deal awful soon, Shorty, or they'll make dishwashers of us to pay our debts."

I was having the recurrent vision of any old Lunar roustabout at a low point.

Plan for Making Earth-Moon Freighting Safe!

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Home—the hills and woods of Missouri. Funny—when I feel like that I've never got the thousand bucks that the short hop of a quarter-million miles costs. Considering the price of atomic fuel and the risks, maybe space travel will always be expensive.

The Spaceshipmen's Union forbids workaway passage as stealing bread from the mouths of its members. And Jody and I had tried to stow away so often that every cop on the blasting-off platforms was ready to jug us on sight.

"We got us a deal, Jody," I said wistfully. "Oxygen-and-water plant, mobile type, to make money off of the optimists going out to the new Holridge uranium strike. We'd be able to sell oxygen-and-water to claim-stakers right and left."

What passes for a face with Jody showed me his disgust. "Oh, sure, Shorty," he rumbled. "Grand idea—with a sure young fortune buried in it. Except that where would you 'n' me find a backer—even offering a sixty-percent-profits-cut to him—who would provide the ten thousand bucks necessary to buy us a Lunar traveler-tractor?

"Not to mention the plant itself and all the tanks and cylinders needed to hold the recovered air and water. Pal, if we could beg, borrow or steal just a little of that kind of dough I'd be back in the Bronx so *damn* fast!"

"There's plenty dough in Luna City," I grumbled. "It's the local gossips that are our trouble. Talking about us and the tantalum ore deal. Sure we made errors in judgment. But you know how gossip is—exaggerating and misrepresenting trifles until we got a bad reputation and nobody to give us a hand."

I stopped griping very suddenly.

"Shorty—do you see what I see?" Jody whispered like a happy gremlin with a guilty conscience.

"I ain't blind," I answered.

WE were a little like a pair of poor Moon-born colonial kids just then—staring, mouths adrool, at a big bowlfull of gorgeous, shiny apples straight from Earth. Yeah—tempted.

A guy had just come into the Dead Rocket. Young—a sweet boy, the old ladies might say. His Lunar dungarees were so new that he might well have thrown away the rah-rah hat of a college freshman an hour before. There was self-consciousness and wonder in his face—the wonder of a greenhorn youngster's first trip off the Earth.

Under one arm he had the *Luna City Argus*. Part of the headline was hidden but I knew what it was: ANOTHER METALS FREIGHTER EXPLODES IN SPACE. BLAME COST-CUT ATTEMPT. Yeah, a monotonus old story.

The kid lacked the sourdough's mask of casualness completely. What his truculent defensive manner tried to say was —*Keep off me, chiselers! I'm smart! I'm nobody's fool!*

What it really said to us and everybody else in the Dead Rocket was—*Here's dough in a baby's pocket. All he knows is that some disgusting characters want it. And maybe he can shoot that blaster in his belt.* Such facts might defeat some folks. But not intelligent guys.

"A youth of this charming calibre would never be off the Earth unless he had at least several thousand greenbacks of security-money on him!" Jody said.

"Now why do you waste expensive wind saying the obvious, Jody?" I asked. "Or have you got evil thoughts?"

"Shucks, no, Shorty," my pal denied with great earnestness. "Fact is, I feel only paternal protectiveness toward little Greenie. Because you and me must have looked something like him when we first came to the Moon. Have *you* got wicked designs on his roll?"

"Sure—not!" I retorted. "My intentions are as pure as yours. I want only to shield him from these greedy characters who have their profane gaze fixed on him from all parts of this dive. Jody, while we work together it might be best if we don't seem to know each other very well. Go hide in the washroom."

Jody obeyed without argument—prov-

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ing that, in spite of past errors, he still respected my wisdom.

Now the tenderfoot, having waited his turn at the bar behind those who wanted drinks, had his chance to ask Rosa Minton whichever of the many things that greenhorns are always wanting to know was troubling him.

Rosa's twenty, dark, tiny—the prettiest girl on the Moon. And straight and sweet with the right individuals. I can't always say the same for her mom and dad; who own the Dead Rocket. She works around the joint and sometimes sings for the crowd. She puts Jody and me quite a ways above some people. We've known her since she was so big.

I sat concentrating my eager stare on her, trying to catch her eye and let her know that I wanted to be helpful. Presently she smiled at me and beckoned. Under envious glares I arose and approached Sonny Boy.

"Shorty," Rosa said. "This gentleman says he must find an Irvin Klosky. An old timer like you. Ever hear of him?"

Very dimly in the murk of my memory I saw another big lug—one who would be lost in the crowd of optimists who had swarmed over the Moon to make their fortunes. Drilled through the guts by a fast meteor out on the Lunar plains, so I'd heard. Maybe three years ago. Drilled and smothered in a punctured spacesuit. "K-l-o-s-k-y," I spelled. "Yeah, I know him."

The greenhorn looked me over. His face was sullen with regrettable worry, suspicion and distaste, all directed at me. Yeah, you have to use subterfuge to get some ninnies to accept your protection from the covetous. "Maybe six feet tall, Klosky is," I said. "No dude. Seldom shaves. Chews tobacco. Lantern jaw. Nose like a bulb. Muscular."

These points were safe to mention. They fitted my dim recollection of Irv Klosky. But Moon-bums conform rather well to a pattern. For instance, what can you do but chew tobacco in a spacesuit when you can't afford to burn up your precious oxygen with cigarettes or a pipe? The description might even almost have fitted my own superior physique, physiognomy and habits. And as for outlining my pal, Jody Nichols, it was perfect. Sonny Boy fell in line—became eager. "That's Klosky all right!" he exclaimed. "My mother informed me what he was like!"

Umhm-m—like that the kid let me know that he had never seen Klosky, in the flesh or by photograph.

"He a relative of yours?" I asked casually, just to start the information rolling my way.

"Distant cousin," Greenie said, sounding glad to spill what was bottled up inside him to anybody who knew somebody he had heard about. "Mother was always praising him as the great adventurer of her family though she hasn't had a letter from him for years.

"But he's rough, ready, capable—the only man on the Moon that I knew about and could trust. I need him—*to help me with the greatest idea of all time!*"

"Gosh!" I commented somewhat skeptically. But it was the right encouragement for Sonny Boy's youthful ego.

"That's right, Mister," he said softly. "The idea that will make transportation between Moon and the Earth safe, sure and *fuelless! Inexpensive* and *self-perpetuating!* The idea that will get all the countless tons of Moon-mined metal across to Earth, not by rocket power but by its own simple potential energy—like a stone rolling down hill! The idea that will put an end to all of these horrible space-freighter disasters!"

AFTER Greenie had said this much, he looked around him with worry and savagery as if, in his enthusiasm—ah, yes, in the vanity of young genius—he had said more than he should.

Right then I was extremely curious. From way in the back of my mind something dovetailed with what he had just told me about this invention of his. And though I knew that, in common with other young and overconfident people, he was imagining a vast fortune for

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himself and eternal historic fame, still—honest to gosh—I felt fatherly toward him, as if he was a page torn from my own past.

"Um," I grunted. "Pal—if you can do all that you sure will be the toast of everybody in the Earth-Moon business. My name's Jake Short. Shorty for short. What's yours?"

That old corny reply of mine—to everybody who asks who I am when it's safe to be truthful—didn't even make him smile. "I'm Lon Hamlin," he stated with sour and cocky impatience. "And can you find me Irvin Klosky?"

"Maybe within the hour, Mr. Hamlin," I replied. "If Irv's in Luna City. Just lemme retire to yonder phone booth."

Of course I didn't call Klosky, who is dead, but a little wizened guy I should be ashamed to know. His quiet specialty is documents—forged.

I came back to Greenie, grinning. "All okay, Mr. Hamlin," I said. "We've just gotta wait around a little for Irv. Hey, Rosa! Give this gentleman a drink. Be right back, mister," I added under my breath and went into the washroom.

It took just a minute to explain things to Jody. He favored me with an evil smile. "My friend," he said, "it is not nice to yield to temptation."

"Yes, Jody, I am tempted—some," I replied. "Because of our present circumstances and because this fair youth is so superior. Still I am yielding only to the extent of hoping for a ticket back to Earth. A fair exchange for service rendered. To shield such a one as Mr. Hamlin from the results of the naiveté of his genius it is necessary to go far out of our way to fool him. So get going—fast."

I boosted Jody out the washroom window.

He was soon back, equipped with an identity card which declared him to be Irvin Klosky. His photograph was attached. And the whole thing was rubbed and crinkled to look old and used.

Well, this Lon Hamlin was not the kind to argue with the obvious. "Mother's long-lost second cousin—I'm very glad to meet you, Mr. Klosky," he said, shaking Jody's big paw. "And now, if we can hire a private room where we can talk. . . . You too, Shorty, being Mr. Klosky's friend."

I was afraid Jody might get stuck if the conversation turned to family history. But I needn't have worried. Little Lonnie was altogether too anxious to speak of his Great Idea to bother with idle reminiscences. In the back room Rosa led us so we all sat down around a table—with drinks, of course. Lon Hamlin started to talk at once.

"Because of the difference in their respective gravities, boys," he said patronizingly, "anything that weighs one pound on the Moon weighs six pounds on Earth. Right?"

"Sure," I agreed.

Lonnie looked pleased with himself. "Okay," he continued. "That difference of five pounds, between one pound of weight on the Moon to its weight of six pounds on Terra, represents tremendous potential energy! Energy that works in the direction of Earth!

"Far more than enough energy to carry anything on the Moon—mined metal, people, plain lava rock, anything at all—across space to Earth *by means of the power inherent in itself!* Right again?"

Well for my part, in spite of some tipoffs to the contrary in what Lon Hamlin had said to me before, I still had sort of suspected that his idea, like a lot of those of the garden variety that attack a great problem, might be strictly in the screwball class.

But no, more and more this Great Inspiration of Greenie's began to look as though it was founded on very sound physical principle. Jody started to show an awed and very interested expression. What difference does it make that this wasn't for quite the reasons you might think? His eyes widened.

"You're absolutely correct, Mr. Hamlin," he pronounced firmly.

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Greenie's face shone with triumph.

"Then it is only necessary to find a way to harness this simple power," he intoned. "Obviously, an object can't just fall off the Moon to Earth. Because, for a small fraction of the distance between the two bodies, the Lunar gravity, though fundamentally so much less than that of the terrestrial, is dominant.

"Let us picture the situation by means of an elementary analogy—a boulder at the bottom of a small depression on top of a hill. By virtue of its superior elevation, that boulder possesses the potential energy to roll to the bottom of the hill with great force. It is only necessary to roll it upward a few feet first to clear the lip of the depression.

"This might be done by attaching it to another boulder by means of a cable —another boulder already rolling down the hill! A little of the latter boulder's kinetic energy would thus be employed to drag the former out of the depression at the hilltop and get it started downward under the force of gravity!

"Then a third boulder, also in the depression at the start, might be attached to the second—with the same result! And so on in a chain or by a kind of siphon-principle as long as there were boulders left in the hollow at the hill's crest."

Jody's eyes had begun fairly to glitter with excitement and I guess the same was true of mine. "Continue, Mr. Hamlin," I said. "How does all this fit the Moon-to-Earth transportation problem now?"

SONNY BOY'S voice quivered with pride and eagerness as he went on. "Don't you see?" he said. "The relatively few thousand miles of the total Moon-to-Earth distance, where the lesser Lunar gravity is dominant, represent the part of the boulders' path where energy must be expended to lift them the little way to the lip of the hilltop depression.

"The much greater distance wherein the far stronger terrestrial gravity rules, represents the hillside itself, where the boulders, joined together by lengths of cable, are free to roll downward, realizing their potential energy of superior elevation in the form of motion, power and distance covered. . ."

Again Lonnie Hamlin paused as if to get his breath. He took a long swig from the glass at his elbow. Jody and I looked at each other.

"Tell us the rest, Hamlin," I urged.

"Visualize it like this," he said. "A small rocket is fired Earthward from the moon, dragging a long cable. A while after it passes beyond the field of dominance of Lunar gravity and begins to fall toward Terra some object—say a small freight-carrying glider—is attached to the cable at the point where it is still being paid out from the moon.

"As in the case of the boulders rolling down the hill this glider is pulled upward from the Moon's surface by the weight of the rocket, now in the grip of the stronger terrestrial gravity and falling toward the Earth.

"When in turn the glider has passed firmly into the field of dominance of Terra's attraction a second freight-glider is hooked to the cable unwinding from the Moon. Its leap toward the Earth is powered by the energy of Earthward fall of both the rocket and the first glider!

"So the process goes on in a chain, more gliders, clamped to the cable, being drawn from the Moon by those already falling toward Earth! The pull on the cable becomes steadily stronger as more and more gliders pass into the zone where terrestrial gravity rules.

"In this tug of war with its satellite Terra has two vast advantages—a six-to-one more powerful attraction and, just as important, a far longer grip! Of all the gliders strung out at intervals from Moon to Earth terrestrial gravity would be dominating all but the first few! So its pull on the cable would increase until the lead-rocket reached Terra. Then it would remain approximately steady.

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"But you don't have to picture the process as consisting of just a single line of gliders on a cable. There are other wrinkles to my idea!"

"*Jeez!*" Jody marveled. There was sweat on his forehead.

My thoughts were whirling. Some of them were rather sheepish. I looked at Lonnie Hamlin, the young wizard, whose eyes were casting about tensely for a means to make his explanations clear to us boneheads. I took a big swallow of liquor from my glass. Then I took a scrap of paper and a pencil from my pocket. "Here," I said to Sonny. "Drawin' a diagram might help."

He made a circle to represent the Earth. And a lesser circle at a little distance, to stand for the Moon.

"Luna keeps the same face toward Terra always—right?" he said, his voice vibrating with excitement. "Okay—then we could have a fixed send-off station for freight and passengers at about the center of the Moon's Earthward hemisphere. Let this big pulley that I mount here represent it."

From one side of the pulley he drew a line. "This is the cable going Earthward from the Moon," he said. "All along its length I put these darts—the loaded freight-gliders. This cross-line, close to the Moon, indicates the boundary between space dominated by Lunar gravity and that ruled by Terrestrial gravity. I just told you all of this.

"But what happens when the rocket-borne cable's end and the gliders reach the outer fringe of Earth's atmosphere?" he went on. "As for the gliders, they just unhook from the cable and glide to a landing with their wings. But does the cable have to trail down to Earth's surface?

"Obviously, since the Earth rotates quite rapidly on its axis and doesn't keep the same side always turned toward the Moon, there couldn't be a fixed freight and passenger station on the Terrestrial surface, as on Luna. No, the cable needn't touch Earth's crust at all! Let it just contact the upper atmosphere, dangling from the Moon and held out straight by Terra's attraction!

"And here's where the big additional wrinkle of the whole idea comes in! As the cable-laying lead-rocket approaches Earth, let it brake speed. Then, a few score miles short of contact, let it make a hairpin turn and trace a parallel path back to the Lunar station and the big pulley on the Moon, drawing the cable around the curve and on its new course after it! Like this. . . ."

HAMLIN sketched in the line. He rushed on triumphantly. "When the rocket gets back to the Moon let a simple splice be made around the pulley-wheel—between the lunar end of the cable and the end brought back by the rocket. Thus. . . ." The pencil moved swiftly. "And what do we have then, boys? You tell me."

"An endless conveyor-cable!" Jody burst out.

"Perfectly correct, Mr. Klosky," Sonny Boy said as if he were patting Jody on the back. "But I haven't shown you all of the possibilities of my idea even yet! Consider the excess power generated on the loaded, Earthbound side of the cable.

"Some of it can be salvaged! It is obvious that, by weight and volume, most Earth-Moon traffic is Earthbound, consisting of metals from the Lunar mines. Only machinery, food, minor freight and passengers go out to the Moon. These supplies and people can have a fuelless ride in a few loaded gliders among the lightweight empty ones, being returned to the Moon on the part of the cable that is being drawn back to the Lunar station by the weight of Earthbound products moving in the opposite direction!"

Lon Hamlin finished at last the outline of his invention. He looked tired and triumphant. "Well, fellas—what do you think of my idea?" he demanded.

I felt tired as from some exhausting experience too. "It's wonderful, Mr. Hamlin." I replied, feeling honest.

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Jody's face was almost sad. "Funny, ain't it?" he commented. "Most truly *great* ideas are simple. For years they used very complicated reciprocating engines on planes, before they figured out the much simpler and faster jet. And this thing of Mr. Hamlin's—it's as uncomplicated as an old-fashioned dumbwaiter! But it sure oughtta work.

"Why, the evenly distributed weight and tension all along that cable-line ought to tend to equalize speeds too—so that none of those gliders would ever go too fast or too slow for safety! There'd be no problem of acceleration or deceleration as in rocket ships. Funny too that nobody ever put this idea across before—though people so often think on the same track. But I guess it *does* take a stroke of genius.

"And think of all the poor guys who died in the wrecks of dangerous spaceships—and of all the money that was wasted building and operating them. While all the time here was this simpler cheaper better idea, just waiting for somebody to think of it! That don't seem fair."

Jody sounded lugubrious. He looked at me. I looked at him. Certain mental flashes of understanding passed between us. We'd been sidekicks for a long time. And we were both all of thirty-two. We looked at Lonnie Hamlin and we both saw a different kind of guy from ourselves—cocky, very young, full of drive and intelligence.

Maybe a little too snooty, green in some ways, probably jealous of the magnificent sweep of his idea—we couldn't have reached any equal understanding with him. But the way things stacked up we sort of had to go along with him and his invention. We had to keep him under our protection more than ever, now. Yeah—because we liked him. Finally Jody asked Hamlin, "You want our help, hunh?"

"If you *can* help, yes," he replied.

"Then that's settled," Jody told him. "Have you done any experimenting yet on your scheme?"

"That's what I'm on the Moon to accomplish," Hamlin snapped back.

"And it'll take money—quite a lot of it," Jody reminded him. "Equipment is expensive."

For a second Sonny Boy looked wary again. But Jody's statement had been reasonable. "On Earth I formed a company and sold stock," Hamlin said proudly. "Quietly—so that no big company would try to scoop me on my scheme. To little people—to interested friends—and of course to members of my family. I've a letter of credit for fifty-thousand dollars. More in cash."

So he was a salesman of great talent too! What a guy he would have been, selling stock for a phony project and then scramming! But this money was for his Great Idea. He was utterly sincere and earnest about it. The money was little people's money—and his family's. His mom's—maybe his grandpa's and his grandma's.

Such thoughts turned the evil cupidity in me to a sour ache of guilt. Still, I couldn't help but think—more than fifty-thousand bucks! But I informed myself that I'd keep my fingers as clean as I could, even if it gave me a nervous breakdown.

"All I'm interested in now are small-scale tests," Sonny Boy was saying. "We'll need a lot of strong, fine-gauge wire to take the place of the cable in a full-scale conveyer setup. I brought a little atomic rocket along with me from Earth. Also some dart-shaped weights."

Jody and I exchanged slow knowing grins of communication again. Yeah, it's a shame how sometimes you have to use subterfuges to do the right thing by certain people. "I know where we can get a huge amount of the wire we need, for nothing, practically," I said.

"That's right, Mr. Hamlin," Jody affirmed. "Leave the problem of supply and equipment in Shorty's hands."

"Of course we'll need a Lunar traveller-tractor—and a few other things," I remarked.

Sonny Boy heaved a great sigh of re-

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lief as if, with Jody and me around, all his troubles were over. Maybe the liquor had helped but all his suspicion and distaste for me seemed to have vanished.

"Great fellas, you old-timers, with the dust of the airless Moon grimed into your hides!" he said, romanticizing us. "One might be led to doubt you but you've sure got helpful human qualities."

AFTER all Sonny Boy was a great kid. Jody and I felt pretty good ourselves. Among other things the hills and woods of Missouri seemed practically within reach. We called for Rosa to bring more drinks. By the way Lonnie Hamlin's face shone you could almost imagine him wearing a wreath of glory. You could almost hear the blare of trumpets and the clash of cymbals. And I could understand.

Outside of the illuminated airdome of Luna City it was still Lunar night—about two Earth-days left out of a total of fourteen. It was best not to start out on our venture till dawn—but those forty-eight hours gave us the time needed for preparations.

I got Sonny Boy a fairly good second-hand traveler-tractor at a very reasonable price. I had to get rid of him for a while to do it, so that local folks, always quick to spot an easy mark, wouldn't think it was for him. All he had to do was supply the money. What he actually did was give me a fifteen-thousand-dollar carte blanche to buy equipment. And that made everything quite to my liking.

Jody—the spurious Irvin Klosky—went along with me when I bought a second-hand mobile-type oxygen-and-water plant and the storage cylinders and tanks to go with it. Maybe with this purchase we slipped just a little from the path of honesty—and this bothered me, some. Also we didn't buy much wire. But we could get a real bargain in wire at a certain place outside of Luna City.

Anyway I felt then that we did right. As for the reasons behind our actions—well, maybe old-timers get in a rut. Maybe they're narrow and limited and lack the splendid daring of concept and execution that is characteristic of youth. They just plod, even in their gambling. And that can be a mistake.

Lonnie Hamlin, we found, was spending most of his time at the Dead Rocket, talking to Rosa Minton or just staring at her. She was so pretty and the way he looked at her made a pretty picture. It gave us a warm feeling around our hearts. Though naturally we worried some that, for instance, she might tell him that Jody wasn't Irv Klosky. But though some Lunar colonials have their faults they have a code. They never squeal on one of their number.

It was strange when once Rosa cornered me and said, her cynical little smile going soft around the edges, "Shorty—he's dumb and he's brilliant and he's self-centered. Maybe he needs knocking down some to make a man of him. But he's earnest and good. Take it easy with him, will you?"

There was something pleading and sweet in the way she looked at me. It bothered my conscience some even when I replied, "Sure, Rosa honey—naturally. You know me—Jake Short."

In the first blaze of dawn Jody and Hamlin and I rode out of an airlock of Luna City in the sealed, air-conditioned cab of the traveler-tractor. Out across the ancient lava plains toward the center of the Earthward hemisphere of the Moon. Around us everywhere was that damnable bleak death-filled and occasionally fascinating Lunar landscape, with its mountain ranges and crater walls lying low against the star-specked sky of space.

By his expression Lonnie Hamlin was clearly on the road to high adventure and eternal fame. He was even singing love-songs under his breath. His small atomic rocket was fastened to the top of our oxygen-and-water plant on the covered trailer behind the tractor. He only glanced to see what was in the trailer itself. I guess he thought it was

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full of wire because I'd left our one roll exposed.

We weren't exactly alone in our exodus from Luna City. Lots of other traveler-tractors and plenty of guys on foot and in space-suits, many with mountainous packs on their backs, were traveling the same trail. They were the optimists, the real chance-takers—going out to the Holridge uranium strike to dig, to stake their claims.

Don't get me wrong. There's money in that kind of business if your lucky. Jody and I had made plenty of it in our time. It just happened, though, that lately we'd become more interested in the sure business dollar earned from a sale of vital commodities to the hopeful. That way *they* take all the chances.

The place we were headed for was in the same direction as the Holridge strike. Only it was twenty miles farther—a total of about three hundred from Luna City. But just about the former distance from our goal our tractor-broke down. That's the trouble with second-hand equipment—it's not dependable.

While Jody proceeded languidly to inspect the damage to our vehicle I wandered afield to hunt for what I knew isn't generally too hard to find. Technically the Moon is waterless and airless. But minerals, oxygen, and water are reasonably plentiful.

For instance there's ordinary alum. Put it on a hot stove and it sizzles as the water in the crystallization boils away. And if all else is absent in a particular region there's still bound to be a certain amount of low-valence ferrous oxide in lava rock—enough to provide a source of oxygen at least.

Ferric oxide—rust—which contains more oxygen, is practically non-existent on the Moon. But in an oxygen-and-water plant adjusted for that kind of job the ferrous oxide serves quite well. Such plants are atom-powered and when necessary can split any compound into its component elements.

What I did find was a lode of gypsum rock, which was almost ideal for our purposes. It contains water, which is released, by simple heating, as steam. This, of course, can be condensed and collected just by cooling. And water is a fine source of oxygen too—being more than half oxygen by weight.

Without much trouble we were able to move our lame traveler-tractor and the plant to the lode. Right away, of course, Sonny Boy got a little worried and annoyed and scared. "Say—what's going on here?" he demanded.

I was very patient with him. "Look, Mr. Hamlin," I said gently, "we can't go far the way our tractor is. You can see that for yourself. But why hurry or worry? We've got lots of time.

"As it happens, Jody—I mean Mr. Klosky, whose nickname is Jody—and I, have come prepared to set up a business which we are very familiar with. It's nice and lucrative and on the level and you're in on it as our backer. So just take it easy, will you, like a good fella?"

Well, it hurt me to watch his face turn kind of grey inside the transparent helmet of his spacesuit—we were all wearing those contraptions now, of course. In his eyes I saw disillusionment, fury, despair and dumb surprise. He looked as if he thought he was going to be murdered out here on the terrible Lunar plain at any moment.

"You stupid hardened Moon-tramp!" he yelled at me by helmet radio. "I might have known by your ugly faces that you'd never be intelligent enough or far-sighted enough—either of you—to be really useful in putting across my Great Idea! I was a fool!"

Nobody can say truly that, though I'm not perfect, Jake Short would deny any person the privilege of blowing his top when he feels so inclined. So I just shrugged and let Sonny Boy rave.

All of a sudden he reached for the blaster that he'd been carrying at his waist. *"Gone!"* he croaked. "The blaster's gone!"

"Maybe you lost it, pal," I suggested mildly. "Anyway, what do you want it for? You don't need it."

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This quiet logic didn't soothe him any. He was ready to tear me limb from limb right then and there. I had to wrestle with him and throw him down hard on the lava a few times to quiet him.

At last he sort of lapsed into a dazed hopelessness, which I was not happy to see. But I didn't care to expend more of my energy, trying to cheer him up by talking to him about the plodding unhurried philosophy of ten-year Lunar colonials like Jody and me.

"Unhook his helmet radio so that he can't start hollering for help to passing claim stakers and then let's get busy with what we gotta do," Jody growled.

That was what we did. We set up the digger, which fed gypsum to our oxygen-and-water plant, and started everything going. Soon we had commodities to sell —and a straggling but steady line of customers. Once Sonny tried to talk by signs to a customer, shaking the guy's shoulders and scowling to get attention.

But Jody said, "Don't mind the kid, friend. He has the usual trouble of some newcomers—homesickness. And temporary Lunar insanity. He'll be okay."

Lonnie Hamlin was passive after that.

Out away from Luna City, in the real wilderness, water sells for twenty or thirty bucks a liter. And it isn't a holdup price either, considering that a claim-staker has a chance—although a very slender one—of finding a fortune in rich ore in a few Earth-days' time.

Theirs is not a game for me any more —but for that kind of gambling fast outlay is the expected thing, accepted cheerfully. Oxygen by weight is twice as expensive as water. A man has to drink water and he can't carry too much of it with him, even on the Moon with its low gravity.

Oxygen helmets have air-purifiers but airtight tents still have to be inflated when men want to eat and sleep. Nitrogen—the principal and inert component of Earthly air—we might have been able to supply too from sealed bubble cavities in certain kinds of Lunar lava. But it isn't necessary to sustain human life. You just use pure oxygen under lesser density and pressure.

In about twelve hours of business we had acquired a very impressive roll of greenbacks. I looked at Jody and then we both looked at Sonny Boy, who was sitting on the ground, sulking and dejected. Jody nodded. So I put the whole roll in Sonny's gloved palm.

His helmet radio still worked as far as the receiver went. "The earnings of a fifteen-thousand-dollar investment—in twelve hours," I said. "All yours, Mr. Hamlin. We'll take a fair share later, Jody and I. Maybe you know one reason now why we stopped here first. That money you brought to the Moon is your family's and your friends' and other people's. It's your responsibility. And they deserve some dividends."

I felt silly as I made that speech. I felt as if Jody and I had turned into a couple of battered saints—redeeming ourselves for all our old and recent wrong-doing. There were fifteen hundred bucks in cash—and more to come.

"We like your idea, Hamlin," Jody said. "We've got reasons. After a certain length of time—maybe a few more Earth-days—we'll go to the site of the future freight station with you."

Sonny stared at the dough. He looked sheepish and guilty and apologetic. He stared at the dough as if it wasn't real. He liked it all right. But all of a sudden he just threw it at us.

"Now how do you figure such manners?" I asked Jody as I gathered the stuff up again.

Jody shrugged. "You know, Shorty."

Sure—Lonnie Hamlin wanted his dough to be earned by his brain child. Any other kind was filthy lucre to him—beneath his dignity. Besides, he was way out in the Moon-desert with a couple of blokes who weren't like him and who had played tricks on him, injuring his ego. Besides, I guess he *was* getting homesick and was suffering from a touch of Moon madness.

We continued producing and selling oxygen and water for several hours

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more. Of course I realized that a greenhorn in Lonnie Hamlin's condition, can be far more dangerous than a million snakes. The trouble with Jody and me, I guess, was that we didn't take Sonny seriously enough as a possible enemy to be really careful.

He didn't recover his own blaster from where I'd hidden it in a locker aboard the tractor. Instead he nabbed mine from behind. Then he had its wicked muzzle covering us. He got the parts I'd removed from his helmet radio out of my chest-pouch and clicked them back into place.

"Fix the tractor, you skunks," he ordered softly. "You know that its breakdown is a fake, arranged by yourselves."

Yeah—right away we were down on our knees, obeying him while he lectured us. "You two are phonies from start to finish," he said, his voice hard.

"You, my worthy Jody, are not my mother's cousin, Irvin Klosky. No relative of mine, even a remote one, could be as cheap and stupid and evil as you and your renegade friend. I will turn you both over to the authorities in Luna City if you remain sufficiently docile.

"Otherwise I may have to kill you. But first we are going where we intended to go—since we are so near the place. Even though we have not enough wire for the experiment—even though you never had any intention of bringing wire or of helping me . . ."

POINTING right at my own person was that terrible blaster, trigger held by a nervous finger at best sketchily controlled by Sonny's half-hysterical mind. I knew then that Jody and I could die out there in the Lunar wilderness—and if it happened who'd ever give a darn? Irv Klosky had died out here. It happened all the time.

But in spite of the scare in him and the jumpiness of his nerves and his inexperience, I still couldn't help admiring Lonnie Hamlin somehow. He had guts and determination. He was a raw frightened kid, who was still managing to do what he had to do according to his own lights. Of course I was seeing him, maybe a little sadly, in the glow of my own younger past. And it kind of got me.

I started driving the tractor. Jody sat beside me. But Sonny was in the rear seat of the cab with his blaster. Twenty miles we had to go—a little over an hour's journey. I began thinking of the laws of physics and of the way the human mind—as represented by different people—runs in parallels. Proving this again, Jody's head seemed to be on the same track as mine—judging by what he began to say to Lonnie Hamlin.

"You really got yourself a great idea, kid. The power is there, pretty much like you explained. And the mechanical design is good."

He didn't say any more and neither did I just then, principally because Lonnie snapped, "Shut up, you crooked old windbag!"

Our destination was in level ground with nothing to mark its position except a small crater nearby. I remembered the latter's slight individual characteristics. I stopped the tractor. "Well, here we are, boss," I growled. "Shall we dismount?"

We got out of the cab. For awhile nobody talked and Jody and I looked around to refresh fond memories as Sonny stared avidly at what was here to see. First he looked almost eager. Then something like panic showed in his face. The silence of the Lunar wilderness seemed like some negative explosion.

Finally I figured that it was safe to talk, even though Lonnie still kept Jody and me covered with his blaster.

"Your idea is so simple, Mr. Hamlin," I said. "Even allowing for certain limitations of the human brain, don't you think somebody must have thought of it before you did? Especially physicists, always busy with that kind of thinking?

"Just a cable going around a pulley—with one side of the cable heavily loaded and outweighing the other side. As simple as an old-time perpetual-motion machine. But a thing that ought to work. . . ."

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Near us was a tentlike airtight shelter, deflated now. For nine years it had been deserted. Nearby were six gigantic spools of fine-gauge wire—just the kind that Sonny had wanted for his tests. It looked brand-new. The years on the airless moon hadn't damaged it a bit. And it was discarded—free for the taking.

Great lengths of the same wire, snapped off, were bunched into angry snarls on the lava rock. There were some small rockets, not much different from the newer one that Lon had brought out from Earth. And there were little dart-shaped weights of metal, fitted with clamps, by which they could be attached at intervals to the wire.

That wasn't all. Lon Hamlin was treated to the sad crystallization of his magnificent idea in the presence of the small pulley—model-size—mounted in a massive frame that was set in a concrete block imbedded in the Moon's crust. Near it was a power-driven high-speed reel. Spaceboot tracks that looked harassed were everywhere in the faint dust on the lava. No wind had passed here to rub them out.

"Who—d i d—all—this?" H a m l i n croaked at Jody and me by helmet radio.

"A whole bunch of guys, long ago," I answered. "Jody and I were in on it. Every once in awhile somebody thinks up this Great Idea to make Moon-to-Earth traffic simpler, safer, cheaper. It has got to be an old joke—a trap for the unwary.

"But because it really ought to work it's more than that. It's a kind of legendary will-o'-the-wisp, here on the Moon. Because it's a physicist's paradox. The energy, the principle, the design, are all in it and are only cancelled out by technical difficulties that defy solution.

"Probably the toughest of these is that no metal or other substance is known to exist from which to make a cable or wire that won't snap under the tension of its own weight when extended even just a small fraction of the two hundred and thirty-nine thousand miles between Moon and Earth. Put a load on such a cable and the situation becomes worse.

"Then there's the problem of the angular momentum of anything coming from the Moon while trying to retain the same Lunar orbital speed in a smaller circle. This would tend to wind the cable around the Earth. There's a lot of mathematics to the whole thing. Don't ask me to remember them now. I was never much good at mathematics."

LONNIE HAMLIN'S face was turning grey and tired. Yeah—I could remember how it was. The triumphant trumpets in one's mind, turning to the rubber burp-devices of derision. The awful blow to young pride and egotism.

Hamlin was almost w e e p i n g. "Dammit!" he snarled. "You pair of apes tricked me in this too. You should have told me!"

I let him have the answer, full force. "What are you looking for, a goat to blame for your own foolishness?" I demanded. "If we'd tried to tell you you would not have listened. You, the smart-guy, would have called us dumb. So we did the best we could."

You could see the genius fairly melting out of him. He was in black exaggerated despair. After a moment his pride attempted wildly to save itself. "If rocket jets were placed at intervals along the cable to reduce the strain on it with their thrust—" he began thickly.

"Unh-unh!" I denied. "You jumped to conclusions before. Now you're trying to patch the Great Idea up. You're using fuel. You're making it complicated and dangerous and expensive, to the point where a spaceship is just as good to haul freight and passengers."

Jody chuckled sorrowfully. "Well," he said, "do we get back to our water and oxygen business or does Mr. Lon Hamlin still want to put us in jail?"

Hamlin's eyes flashed us one pain-wracked glance of reproach.

For better than a month the three of us worked together, practically coining money. There'd never been a strike like the Holridge strike. Lots of the claim-

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stakers got rich. Part of this wealth naturally found its way into the construction of better and safer spaceships for the Earth-Moon circuit. That was one improvement.

Sonny Boy stopped groaning quite soon. Yeah, he had the guts to do it. There was soon a shrug and a grin in him. The stockholders of his company got paid, so why should they kick? He became Ham to Jody and me, which is to say he was now an old-timer. Back in Luna City he continued his acquaintance with pretty Rosa Minton—with the usual happy result.

And Jody and I didn't go back to Earth, like we have often meant to on various occasions, as soon as we had the price. It's a longer way home than it ever seems to be. Maybe the Moon gets under your skin and holds you.

The airless plains and craters—the mines—the new industrial cities springing up. When you're doing all right on Luna there's always some proposition or rainbow's end to hold you there.

Maybe it's partly Ham's fault. He's a funny guy. He didn't give up the Great Idea as easily as guys like Jody and I did long ago—only remembering it wistfully and sheepishly for ten years. He's a more determined sort.

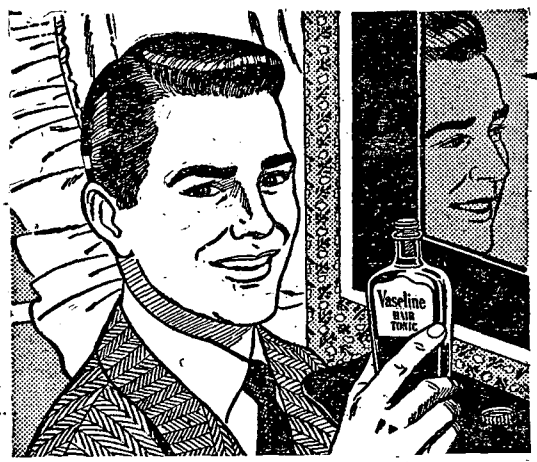
But on the other hand, maybe this is really his wife's fault. Because now Rosa affects Jody and me—along these lines—just as she does her husband. She's stubborn and gentle and whimsical.

I remember what she said the other night, at Ham's and her apartment. "The Great Idea is still around, boys. One pound on the Moon still weighs six on Earth. There ought to be a way to harness the energy represented by the difference, to power Lunar-Terrestrial traffic, save lives and make the price of Earth-made house-furnishings cheaper on the moon."

So we're all sort of interested in investigating the matter further. Has anybody got any *practical* suggestions?

oh-oh, Dry Scalp!

"SAM'S nice, but he'd be a lot nicer if he did something about that Dry Scalp! His hair is dull and unruly—and he has loose dandruff, too! I've got just the ticket for him—'Vaseline' Hair Tonic!"



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LOST ART

Want a Rigellian flower garden, a Moonflower, or a Chlorian prayer mat? These space sleuths will find it—at a price!

I

THERE WAS Callaghan, just in from Deneb V, and he was quietly and slowly sipping his second tankard of stout—the first had gone down almost without touching the walls of his throat— when Brent walked into the bar.

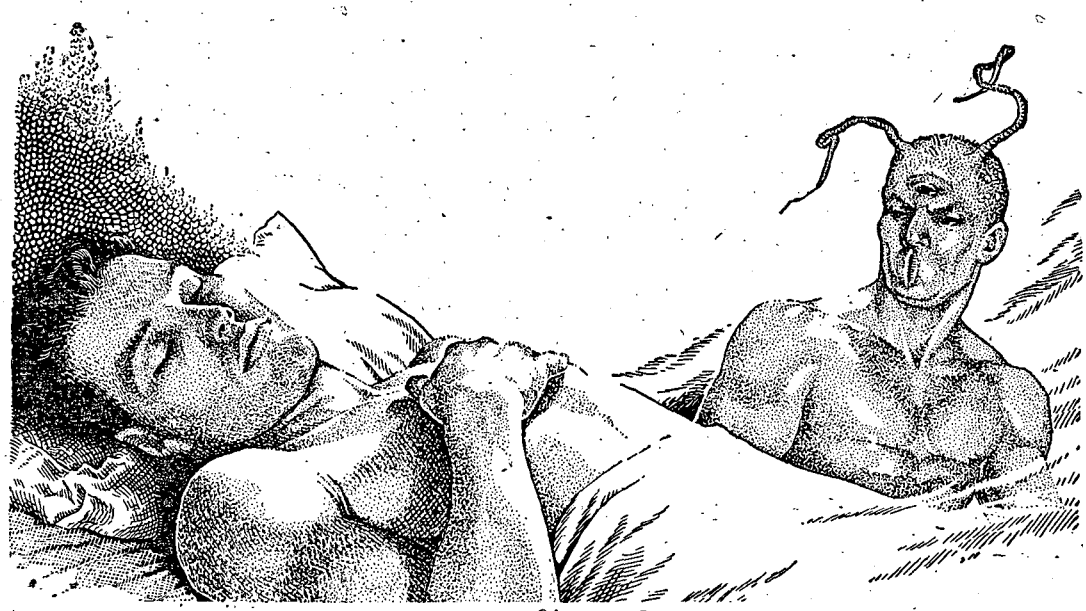
"Hi, Callaghan," said Brent.

"Hi, Brent," returned Callaghan, neither showing nor feeling much enthusiasm.

"A *sligol*, Joe," said Brent to the barman. "Better make it a double."

Callaghan's sandy eyebrows lifted slightly. Most spacemen have acquired a taste for the fancier imported liquors, but they indulge this taste either on the worlds of origin of the exotic tipples or aboard their own ships, at duty free prices. To order such a drink here, on Earth, implied the enjoyment of an income somewhat greater than that of a watch officer or even of a master. And Brent, to the best of Callaghan's knowledge and belief, was still no more than second pilot of a tourist-class liner on the Centaurus run.

Callaghan looked at Brent with a certain curiosity, admitted to himself that the other's civilian clothes matched his taste in drinks, were just a little too well tailored and of too expensive a material for a spaceman in mufti. And he —Brent—had always been such a



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A Novelet by **A. BERTRAM CHANDLER**

Deep within the lucent transparency were two figures, a man and a woman

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scruffy young puppy in the days when the two of them had been cadets together.

"What's the Red Setter drinking?" asked Brent.

"The usual," said Callaghan. "Stout. And the name is Callaghan."

"Have a *sligol*," urged Brent. "Or what about a glass of that new liquor from Alpheratz Seven—*tiger's kiss* or whatever they call it?"

"Stout," said Callaghan.

BRENT gave the order; then: "I saw that the *Pegasus* was due in. I thought I'd find you here."

"The pleasure is all yours," said Callaghan.

"Don't say that you still remember that little blonde in Port Lasalle. That was years ago. Besides—there's one or two grudges that *I* could bear. But that's not my way."

True enough, thought Callaghan. True enough. But I wish that the man looked more like a spaceman and less like a tout for a high class bordello.

"Are you still on the Centaurian run?" Callaghan asked.

"Good heavens, no. There's no money in Space—at least, not in the Service." He fished in his pocket. "Here," he said, giving a card to Callaghan.

Callaghan looked curiously at the little oblong of plastic, at the words in their bold, black print.

JAMES BRENT
LOST ARTS, INCORPORATED

He asked, "What sort of racket is this?"

Brent laughed. "It's not a racket. We deliver the goods."

"But what sort of goods?"

"Joe," said Brent to the barman, "you've got a room, haven't you? One with all the usual—precautions?"

"Yeah," Joe replied. "Up the stairs, first right. Shall I send anything up?"

"A bottle of *sligol*," said Brent.

"And six bottles of stout," ordered Callaghan. "I'll pay for the stout."

"There's no need—" began Brent.

"I prefer it that way," Callaghan told him.

The drinks were on the table when they got to the room. Callaghan sat down at once. Brent satisfied himself that the screen generator, humming and flickering quietly to itself under the table, was functioning properly. He returned the little testing device to his pocket, sat facing Callaghan.

"You must make a habit of this," said Callaghan.

"Now and again. Some of our customers like secrecy. And some of them prefer to make their deals with us neither in their offices nor ours."

"I said it was a racket."

Brent shook his head.

"It's not. Now, Callaghan, suppose that you were a millionaire, and suppose that your current mistress just had to have a Rigellian fairy garden for her birthday—what then?"

"I'd get me a new mistress. The making of those fairy gardens is a lost art, and the museums wouldn't part with their specimens for all the money in the Universe."

"You'd come to us," said Brent. "Or suppose this mistress of yours wanted a Moonflower?"

"They've been extinct a couple of hundred years. Should I come to you?"

"You should, my boy. Provided, that is, you have the folding money to pay us."

"But what's all this to do with me?"

"Ah," said Brent. He refilled his own glass and Callaghan's tankard. "You know, Red Setter, I've always liked you. Really, I have. And I had this opportunity to do you a good turn . . . And, frankly, I know that you can keep your mouth shut."

"Go on."

"Well, it's like this. We—Lost Arts—have a ship. Up until now I've been captain, navigator, chief pilot and everything else that's needful. Of course, we've trusted the automatics far more

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than you do in the Service. Even so, it's been plenty—and I've had the commercial side of it all to look after too."

CALLAGHAN stared at Brent, a smile on his lips.

"So you want me to resign from the Service and come into your swindle."

"It's *not* a swindle. And you needn't resign. I've been making inquiries—I know a girl in your personnel department—and I'm told that you're due a year's leave. Why not make just one trip with us and see how you like it? Master's salary *and* a percentage of the take."

"I'll think about it."

"Good. Where can I find you?"

"Never mind that. I'll get in touch with *you*. I suppose you're in the Directory?"

"Of course. But we leave on our next expedition in two months' time. You'll want at least a week to get familiar with the ship and the gear."

"All right," said Callaghan. "Six weeks from now I'll give you a buzz." He rose to go. "But you haven't told me anything."

"And you'll be told nothing—until you're with us. I can say, quite truthfully, that it's a new archaeological technique. You'll have to be satisfied with that."

"Six weeks from now, then," said Callaghan. He hoped, as he left the bar, that he wouldn't be too late for his dinner appointment. . . .

His host, this evening, was Bellerton, Chief of Palandurian Synthetics. He, Bellerton, had traveled to Earth in *Pegasus*, had become friendly with the second pilot of the ship. "You must have dinner with me," he had told Callaghan, "the day we get in. At the Terran Club."

It was only a short walk from the Titan Bar to the club. Callaghan wished, however, that he had taken a taxicopter for that absurdly small distance. The gorgeously uniformed doorman watched his pedestrian arrival with contempt, kept him waiting at the over-ornate entrance while a page was sent in search of Bellerton.

"Are they too poverty stricken to buy a public address system?" Callaghan asked the doorman, receiving no reply but a frozen stare.

"Ah, here you are, my boy," said Bellerton, bustling into the lobby. "Some young whippersnapper of a juvenile admiral told me—" he raised his voice to a squeaky falsetto—"that a space-faring person wished to see me. But come along, we'll have a drink first."

Callaghan handed his uniform cap and cloak to a supercilious blonde, followed the little, portly industrialist.

"It'll have to be the Strangers' Bar," said Bellerton. "The Members' Bar is *very* exclusive. I have member's privileges, of course, through my own club on Deneb Five, but I prefer the company of the strangers."

The Strangers' Bar was comfortable enough and, thanks to the presence of a few outsiders, guests of various members, lacked the stuffed shirt atmosphere of the rest of the club. Bellerton drank whisky, Callaghan stuck to his stout.

"I always believe in drinking the wine of the country," said Bellerton. "I like *sligol*, when I can drink it on Aldebaran Four at twenty-five cents a shot, but I'm damned if I'll pay five credits a thimbleful here."

"I met an old friend—or shipmate—before I came here," said Callaghan. "*He* was drinking *sligol*. I wonder if you've heard of his firm, Lost Arts, Incorporated, they call themselves."

"H'm. Let me see . . . There was Twiss, of United Minerals—he's always had more money than sense. He set his heart on having a genuine Chlorian prayer mat and, needless to say, none of the museums would part with their specimens, nor would the half dozen or so of private collectors who've got one. He did tell me that he was putting these Lost Arts people on the trail, and he's got his prayer mat now, a perfect specimen. If you didn't know that the

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last one was woven all of five hundred years ago, you'd swear that it was fresh from the loom." Bellerton chuckled. "At about the same time he sold a block of two thousand shares in United Minerals."

"They can afford fancy drinks, then," said Callaghan.

"Who? Oh, the Lost Arts people. If they had to rely on my money, they wouldn't have enough for a glass of beer."

"You're not a collector, Bellerton," said one of two men who were standing next to the millionaire.

"No, Grimshaw. And I hope I never am."

"And your friend?"

A LAUGH burst spontaneously from Callaghan. He shook his head.

"Postage stamps as a kid," he said.

"You should keep it up," the other man told him. "In your job you have the opportunities."

"Still got *your* collection, Baker?" Grimshaw asked his friend.

"Yes. But I'm thinking of selling. Other interests, you know." He finished his drink. "What about coming out for dinner, Bellerton? And you, Mr.—er—"

"Callaghan," supplied Bellerton.

"Callaghan—quite. Come along too, Callaghan. Afterwards, we can look at my little museum."

"What do you say, Callaghan?" asked Bellerton.

"Thanks. I'd like to."

Baker owned a large Spurling that, fitted with rockets instead of jets, could easily have been put on the Earth-Mars service. There was a uniformed pilot with as much gold braid as the master of an interstellar liner and, thought Callaghan, probably as much pay. You could have held a dance in the big main cabin and, for those not fond of dancing, there was a well appointed bar. Baker left his guests in their overstuffed comfort, went forward and took the controls.

"Poor old Baker's collection," laughed Grimshaw as soon as their host was out of earshot. "It gets him blackballed every time that his name comes up for membership. The Archbishop is very hostile."

"*Stamps?*" asked Bellerton, puzzled.

"No. He's selling his *stamps*. But his 'other interests,' as he called them. His little museum. Wait until you see it. Mind you, there's one piece that I'd give him a blank check for. *If* he'd sell."

Callaghan did not join in the conversation but stared through one of the windows, watching the world from which he had been absent for so long. But Baker was flying high and little was visible below them but cloud, and occasional sparkling city lights through the cloud. And above were the stars—clear, unwinking—and, thought Callaghan, their company was preferable to that of these fat, gross men with their stink of money. Oh, Bellerton was all right, but he had been able to amass wealth more because of his ability as a chemist and an engineer than by any shopkeeper's skill in buying and selling. And he would not, as would these others, pay a fantastic sum for some trivial object valuable only because of its rarity.

Callaghan had once, as he had said, collected stamps himself, but he had never been a true collector. A common Vanadian ten-cent blue with its charmingly executed picture of an airship coming in to its mooring mast was worth far more to him than the priceless, but ugly, Titanian fifteen-cent black.

The thin, high whistle of the Spurling's passage through the atmosphere grew increasingly audible as Baker brought her down through the clouds. "There's his place," said Grimshaw, pointing.

"Looks like a young city," remarked Bellerton. Then: "And not so young at that."

"He has quite a big staff," said Grimshaw. "A couple of hundred guards alone. Mind you—he needs 'em. There's one of his things that I'd be quite capable of knocking off."

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II

AT HIGH speed, the Spurling swooped down in a steep dive, the irregular rectangle of bright lights expanded fast. It seemed to Callaghan, used to the care exercised in big passenger ships, that Baker must have been seized by a sudden fit of suicidal mania. He started up from his seat with the half formed intention of going forward and grabbing the controls. Bellerton pulled him down.

"I've heard tales of this Baker," he said. "He can outfly any pilot in the known universe." He grinned. "Or so they say."

"He wouldn't last five minutes in the interstellar mail," grunted Callaghan. "Is he never pulling out?"

Baker did not pull out of his dive. When the ground seemed but short seconds distant, he swung the jets in their turret, gave them full blast. The ship shuddered and creaked, the three passengers found themselves sprawling against the forward bulkhead of the cabin. Bottles crashed in the bar and there was the smell of spirits the replacing of which would have cost Callaghan a good two months' pay. Yet the actual landing, when it came, was feather-light.

Baker, coming aft from the pilot's compartment, was offensively jovial. "No bones broken, I hope? Really, Callaghan, and you a spaceman! There's some excuse for these other two losing their balance, but you—"

"Your bar is in ruins," said Callaghan.

"Oh, *that*. They'll clean it up. Come on. I want dinner."

Baker led them through the ornate grounds, past guard points where men and machines and huge mastiffs kept unceasing watch, into a house that, like its master, was plain and gross. The spaceman had a confused impression of red plush and dark mahogany, of suits of antique armor standing like humanoid robots awaiting the word of command. The room in which they were to dine was small, oak paneled, candle-lit, with dark oak beams across the ceiling.

"From an old inn in England," said Baker. "It cost a million."

The food was simple but expensive. Here were no costly imported wines and viands—but the steak had been broiled over charcoal rather than by high frequency radiation, and the Burgundy, Callaghan guessed, had been purchased with quality as the prime consideration, and the Stilton—the making of which was now almost a lost art—must have cost, pound for pound, equally as much as any delicacy from the furthermost planetary system of the Federation. With the cheese came a Port wine, of so deep and rich a color in the light of the candles that it seemed sacrilege to drink it—and, having tasted it, sacrilege to think of leaving any in the decanter.

Coffee and Kummel—the glass warmed and the rim sprinkled with grated nutmeg—and Havana cigars finished the meal. Baker sprawled in his chair, the ash from his cigar fouling the front of his tunic, and looked at his guests through the blue smoke.

"As soon as we've finished our smokes," he said, "we'll see my collection."

"You'll enjoy it," Grimshaw told Bellerton.

"Shall I?"

"And your young friend will," said Baker. "A spaceman, fresh from the stars, woman-starved—"

"I was in the same ship," Bellerton laughed, "and he didn't seem to be doing so badly. Especially on dance nights."

"A bit of a young dog, hey?" Baker leered at Callaghan. "Then he'll enjoy it all the more."

Callaghan started to feel a little sick.

He wasn't sorry, however, to follow the three older men out of the little room that had become, with their cigar smoke, more than a trifle stuffy. He wasn't sorry to exchange the flickering light of the archaic candles for that of the fluorescents outside. It was a long passageway down which Baker led them, a passageway floored and walled, and

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roofed with dark, featureless plastic, at the end of which was a huge, steel door like the door of a gigantic safe.

BAKER played with dials and levers for at least five minutes, and then, moving slowly and ponderously, the massive door opened. They passed through into darkness—a darkness that was impenetrable when the door shut behind them. Baker laughed and said, "Now!"

The lights came on.

The pictures around the walls were the first to catch the attention. Naked flesh and intricately entwined limbs, the act of love made enduring in oil and pigment for all time by masters. Callaghan looked at Baker, saw the gleaming eyes, the moist, sensual parted lips. He looked at Grimshaw—and Grimshaw returned his gaze, the ironical expression on his face saying, as plainly as words, "Schoolboy smut!" Callaghan looked at Bellerton, and saw disgust struggling with an avid interest. He was pleased to see that disgust won.

"My erotica," said Baker.

"The Greeks had a better word for it," said Grimshaw. "Pornography."

"And dirty little boys in the streets of Port Almain," said Bellerton, "sell dirty little postcards. But they aren't quite as dirty as this."

"And you, Mr. Callaghan?" asked Baker.

"Filth," said Callaghan.

"But you're young. You wouldn't begrudge an old man his simple pleasures?"

"I would so."

"Ah, the intolerance of youth. But come, gentlemen—the pictures aren't all. And there's at least one item that Grimshaw would give me a blank, signed check for. But he's not getting it."

The pictures, as Baker had said, were not all. There was, for example, a solidograph of the Casmian fertility rites—"Two men died getting that," said Baker. "I've destroyed the negative." There were rare books in exquisite bindings. "They did a limited edition of twelve of this," said Baker, picking one up. "I bought them all, and burned the other eleven."

"May I?" asked Callaghan. He leafed through the book. It was verse, decadent verse, and the illustrations matched. He handed the book back. "It's a pity you didn't burn all twelve."

"And this," said Baker, "is a specimen of the *yoni* used by the sailors on Fomalhaut Three."

"Schoolboy stuff," said Grimshaw. "You know what I've come to see."

"Not so fast," Baker told him. "Now, gentlemen, what do you think of *this?* Sarsen did it for me, and he charged enough."

This was a painting of what, at first glance, could have been some gorgeous tropical flower. At second and subsequent glances it wasn't.

Grimshaw was getting impatient. "How much more of this adolescent smut?"

"Oh, all right. All right. Come on."

Baker led them to the end of the hall, to a door that was a miniature of the one through which they had entered. He bent over the dials and levers, breathing heavily. When the door at last opened all the lights in the hall went out and a single, amber-glowing light in the little room came on. Like some huge jewel the crystal sphere lay on its nest of black velvet.

"The only one of its kind," said Baker, his gross body still blocking the little doorway. "You'll have heard of the Sympats of Tregga, of course."

"A little," said Callaghan.

"Who were they?" asked Bellerton.

"A humanoid race, inhabiting one of the planets of Achernar," Baker told him. "The Lymners, inhabiting the same planet, belong to the same species. About six hundred of our years ago they had a war, and wiped the Sympats off the face of their planet. They didn't like what the Sympats did to pass the long, winter evenings. After the war they destroyed every specimen of the Sympats' art that they could lay their

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hands on. One or two keep turning up—the museum at Worrilunger has a *tissit*—a dog-like creature. And at Port Gregory they have a Lymner warrior. Not counting my own, there are only six known specimens."

"But what did the Sympats do?" asked Bellerton.

"Long ago," went on Baker, "certain savage tribes on this world made a hobby of collecting and shrinking the heads of their enemies. The same kind of thing has been done on many of the known worlds. But the Sympats took the entire body and shrank it in perfect proportion, preserving the finished work of art in crystal. As—*here!*"

HE MOVED away from the doorway, led his guests into the tiny room. Beautiful against its dead black setting the crystal sphere glowed, warmly golden. And, deep within the lucent transparency, were two figures, a man and a woman, both naked. Their mouths were pressed together in a kiss, their bodies were pressed together. Their faces were hidden by the woman's long, red hair.

Had they been standing erect the man would have been not more than six inches tall, the woman a little less.

"Beautiful," breathed Grimshaw.

"I almost envy them," said Bellerton surprisingly. "I feel that they're still alive, somehow—that they've been frozen for all eternity in that one, supreme moment."

"Something wrong here," Callaghan said, trying to keep his voice matter of fact. "From what I can remember of my history the worlds of Achernar were first reached not earlier than a hundred years ago—Banning's expedition, wasn't it? And yet these—people are, as far as I can see, definitely human. They've both got red hair, too, and none of the races like us in the known universe run to that coloring. They certainly aren't Lymners—they haven't got the tendrils. And Lymners are bisexual; they don't—and can't—go about things *that* way."

"A very early expedition?" Bellerton wondered. "One that got lost, somehow, and left no record?"

"No. Six hundred years ago we didn't have rockets, let alone interstellar ships."

"My own theory," said Baker, "is that these were two Earth people kidnaped, as specimens, by the Morcons. Legend has it that their ships visited our planet during one of their mass migrations. They might have called in at Tregga to have their specimens mounted, and somehow left this one behind when they pushed on."

"Could be," agreed Callaghan. "But all the evidence, such as it is, indicates that the Morcon drift was from south to north, not north to south."

"The evidence, such as it is," said Baker, "is no more than myth and legend, and where the Morcons finally landed up nobody knows."

"You could almost swear you saw them move," whispered Grimshaw. "How *much*, Baker?"

"More money than *you* can lay your hands on."

For a while the four men looked at the two little figures, their eternal moment imprisoned in enduring crystal, in silence. Callaghan was sorry when Baker, preparing to go, shepherded his guests out of the shrine of the crystal sphere, back into the hall of blatant and vulgar pornography. Biological urge had played but a small part in Callaghan's life, yet he felt a feeling almost of kinship to the little man in the crystal, a vague unease that had in it a little of envy.

Baker, having displayed his treasures, had shot his bolt, was no longer interested in his guests. He offered them his Spurling to take them back to the city, an offer that they accepted. The gold-braided pilot gave them a smoother, if less fast, ride than the one they had suffered under Baker's command. The damage to the bar, Callaghan noticed, had been repaired.

All three men were silent during the trip. The other two, Callaghan decided, must be thinking, like himself, about the

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last and most precious item in Baker's collection. And Callaghan, as he pondered over the events of the evening, was not so sure that he did envy the two lovers after all. An eternity of being gloated over by men like Baker (Did they know? *Could* they know?) would be so near to Hell that no difference could be detected.

With part of his mind he heard Grimshaw break the silence. "I'll get one like it, Bellerton. I'll get one like it, no matter what it costs. I know some people—"

On down-pointing jets the big Spurling drifted in to the Terran Club landing field, and there Callaghan said good night to Bellerton and Grimshaw. Baker's pilot said that he would take him to the port, but Callaghan refused the offer. He walked back to his ship, and the cold, night air and the thin, chill drizzle were clean, and by the time that he saw the floodlit tower that was *Pegasus* rising high above the low warehouses, he felt more like a man again, and less like a spotty-faced, prurient minded adolescent.

But he dreamed that he and a desirable woman were imprisoned forever in a sphere of crystal.

III

NEXT DAY Callaghan spent handing over responsibilities to his relief.

That evening he left the ship, feeling very lost and lonely. He had no people—his father and mother had been killed in the Martian Mail disaster of '83, his sister was married to a *gravtol* planter on Regulus IV, and the last time that he had visited them he had found that both she and her husband were boringly bucolic. His school friends were all married and lived in a world in which he was the veriest alien—the smug, snug little world of the planetbound.

That night he spent at the Astronauts' Club, made a few unpromising visiphone calls to various acquaintances, then turned in early. The next day he started his travels. He took passage on one of the big dirigibles for a West Indian cruise and soon had his bellyful of rum and synthetic calypsoes. He left the airship at Panama City, traveled to Port Kingsford in Westralia by the next Antipodean rocket. A Moon ship was leaving a bare two hours after his arrival, and so he went to the Moon.

The combination of rugged grandeur and tinsel charm held him for a while, and then both the spacesuited mountaineering and the feverish gaiety inside the Pleasure Dome palled, so he took the Lunar Ferry back to Earth. Just six weeks had elapsed since he had paid off from *Pegasus*.

After the Ferry had landed Callaghan went straight to the nearest phone booth. He dialed for World Directory, asked the girl whose face appeared in the screen for Lost Arts, Incorporated. "Their office is in New York," he was told. "A call will cost you seventeen credits."

Callaghan, who had taken the precaution of changing two ten-credit notes into the necessary tokens, fed seventeen of the big metal discs into the slot. The screen blanked; then a new picture formed—an office switchboard. "Lost Arts," said the charming, expensive blonde, "Incorporated."

"Can I speak to Mr. Brent?"

"Whom shall I say is calling?"

"Callaghan."

"Just a moment, Mr. Callaghan."

The picture shifted to a sumptuous office. Brent—looking fatter and more prosperous even in six short weeks—was sitting at a desk the polished top of which was big enough for an ice hockey match.

"Ah," he said, "the Red Setter. So you're coming in with us."

"The name's Callaghan."

"Have a good time on the Moon?"

"How did you know I've been there?"

"So my spies have informed me," laughed Brent. "But you're calling from Port Windsor, and I happen to know that the only ship due there today is the Lunar Ferry. Furthermore, my dear

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Watson, you've lost your Deep Space pallor and picked up a tan that speaks highly for the Pleasure Dome solarium. . . How soon can you be here, Callaghan?"

"There's a Transatlantic rocket this afternoon," Callaghan answered.

"Take it then. At our expense."

"I travel free on leave, as you should know."

"I'd forgotten," Brent said. "Send in an expense account, anyhow. Interstellar Mail doesn't buy your drinks for you."

It was still early afternoon in New York when the Transatlantic rocket roared in. Brent was waiting at the airport with his big, private Spurling, a machine only a little less ornate than Baker's had been. Brent, however, did not run to a liveried pilot. He could afford one, he was careful to explain to Callaghan, but he liked to keep his hand in.

THEY flew over the city, Brent keeping his ship a respectable distance above the three-thousand-foot towers. He pointed out one of them to Callaghan, who was in the pilot's compartment with him, saying, "There's our office. In the Metcalfe Building. Two whole floors."

"You must be doing nicely."

"Very nicely. Wait until you see my place on Long Island."

The Long Island place was new, built in that style of architecture modelled upon starship design. Give it a Drive Unit, thought Callaghan, and it'll fly. . . It was a spaceship in gleaming white plastic, standing in the centre of two square miles of park land. It reeked of money.

The hangar was in the base of the building, the entrance being between two of the dummy fins. From the hangar a lift took Callaghan and his host up to a spacious living room, occupying one complete deck of the "ship." It was well furnished with deep easy chairs, lavishly upholstered lounges. There was a tridi video with a ten-foot screen, shelves upon which were stacked reel after reel of tapes. There was even a bookcase—although, Callaghan noticed, the gilt on the bindings of the books was suspiciously bright and untarnished.

Three people were watching the video show when Callaghan and Brent came in. They got to their feet as the two entered. "This is the Red Setter," said Brent, "otherwise Callaghan. Callaghan, Miss Frayne." Callaghan bowed. "Dr. Overholtz, Mr. Taylor." Callaghan shook hands with the men.

It was Vega Frayne who held his attention. She was almost as tall as he, and her hair was as red as his own. She had high cheekbones and a full, sullen mouth. The flimsy green thing that she was wearing matched the green of her eyes, did little to hide the long, slim grace of her limbs and body. And Callaghan felt for her the revulsion that red haired people so often do feel for each other. And she feels it, too, he thought. But I've seen her before somewhere.

"Miss Frayne," Brent was saying, "is, like yourself, a newcomer in our organization. Just as we now want a full-time captain to our ship, so we want a full-time archaeologist.

"Taylor, here," the little, gray, wizened man grinned without warmth or humor, "is our business man. And Overholtz," his little black eyes are like currants in dough, thought Callaghan, "is our technician. He studied under Mannschen as a young man."

"He's the type," said Taylor, staring at Callaghan, and laughed.

Brent frowned at the business man. "Of course he's the type. By the time you've finished your cadetship with Interstellar Mail, you're qualified to take any ship in Space. No need to wait for a brass hat."

"And what field do *you* specialize in, Miss Frayne?" asked Callaghan. "Earth, Mars—or beyond?"

"Beyond," she said. "I got my doctor's degree for my thesis on the Transonian culture of Procyon Twelve, but

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recently I've been doing field work on Achernar Six—Tregga, as the natives call it. But those damned Lymners? Do you know, they've left hardly a trace of the old Sympat culture."

"Can't say that I blame 'em," said Callaghan. "The butterfly has no cause to love the butterfly collector."

"So you know something about 'em," said Brent.

He walked to the bar, poured drinks for his guests and himself. He said, "You see that I got a pewter pot for you, Red Setter, and a case or so of the real Liffey water from Dublin. ... Here's to us."

"We shall be going to Tregga," said Taylor. "There's a man called Baker who has a rather fine specimen of the old Sympat art, and there's another man called Grimshaw, with more money than sense, wants another one just like it. We shall do our best to find him one."

"We shan't," said Vega Frayne. "There just aren't any more pieces left. And if there were, if one should be found, the Lymners would smash it."

CALLAGHAN stared at Vega for a long moment before answering.

"I've seen one of those—pieces," Callaghan said slowly. "Tell me—what happens when they're smashed?"

"The things inside the crystal," Taylor explained, "shrunken though they are, aren't really dead. But when the crystal is broken they *do* die, rather slowly and horribly. I found one, once, in my digging in the Kor-Semar ruins. A *blithol*, it was, one of those big, draught animals of theirs, shrunk down to the size of a Spaniel. And while I was admiring it, Stirrik, my Lymner foreman, rushed up and shattered the crystal with his spade. It seemed, then, that the *blithol* tried to expand to its proper size. It screamed for a long time, and went on screaming even when it was no more than a huge heap of burst and tattered flesh."

"You should have shot him," said Brent.

"But I did. I couldn't just stand there and watch and listen to the thing in agony."

Brent went on quickly, "Your foreman, I mean. The fool!"

"Yes. I did feel like shooting him. . . . But, as Mr. Callaghan has pointed out, those people have every reason to hate even the memory of the Sympats."

"So there you are," said Brent. "All you have to do is to take our ship—*Collector*, we call her—to Tregga. And you get your salary and a five percent cut of whatever Grimshaw pays."

"*If* we find his specimen," said Vega Frayne.

"We shall find it," said Brent.

Collector, as Callaghan discovered when he took Brent's spare Spurling out to the Nevada spaceport, was a sizeable vessel. He showed the watchman his pass, spent two days in inspection of the ship. She wasn't new, had been built as long as twenty years ago as an interstellar tramp. Her accommodation had been modified and vastly improved, however, and about one third of her original cargo space was now living quarters.

One thing annoyed Callaghan. All the ship was open to him, including the control and reaction drive rooms, but not the Mannschen drive chamber. Neither the watchman nor the spaceport officials knew where the key was. Callaghan put through a call to Brent, was told by him that only Overholtz had access to the interstellar drive.

"Damn it all!" exploded Callaghan. "You want me to be master of this blasted ship of yours, and the essential guts of her are hidden away from me like jam from a schoolboy!"

"Dr. Overholtz studied under Mannschen," said Brent. "He's forgotten more about the Drive than you and I will ever know. Besides—once we're in space you can stare at the blasted thing all you like. We always keep it shut in port."

And with that Callaghan had to be satisfied.

He spent more time, thereafter, at the

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spaceport than at Brent's luxurious establishment. He was prepared to be friendly to Brent—after all, they had been shipmates—but soon found that the man, after resignation from the Service, had become even more insufferable than he had been as a junior officer. He had nothing in common with Taylor, and Overholtz, outside his mathematics, was interested only in eating and drinking. Callaghan was prepared to admire Vega Frayne from a distance—and the longer the distance the better. Her presence in any room in which he was affected him as a cat does persons who are allergic to those charming animals.

Callaghan stored the ship, checked the working of such instruments as were accessible to him. He learned from Brent that the additional accommodation in the cargo spaces was to be occupied; learned, too, that *Collector* was taking cargo in what remained of her capacity. This cargo, when it came, intrigued him immensely. One crate, when he opened it, he discovered to contain steel crossbows. Another contained swords. Yet another, small muzzle-loading cannon. Among the ship's stores were cases of modern firearms.

AT LAST came sailing day. Brent's big Spurling drifted in to the landing field, bringing Brent, Taylor, Overholtz and the girl, Vega Frayne. Another ship arrived, a big transport, and from it stepped thirty of the toughest gorillas that Callaghan had ever seen. They were all in brown uniform, and marched up to the ship in military formation. They were told by Brent to go to the accommodation in the cargo spaces.

"Why the goon squad?" asked Callaghan as he met Brent by the boarding ramp.

"Oh, I always take Sergeant Grimes and his men along, just in case."

"In case of what? I tell you, Brent, that I'm having none of this if it's not legal. I've got a certificate to worry about. After all—I'm still an officer of the Interstellar Mail."

"So what? Don't worry, Red Setter. I haven't broken any Federation laws yet." He laughed. "I *couldn't*."

"What do you mean?"

"Never you mind. Got the Clearance?"

"Yes."

"Then what are we waiting for? Take her upstairs."

They entered the ship, and as *Collector's* airlock door closed the ramp was drawn away. The green lamp was flashing from the signal tower. Callaghan and Brent took the lift to the control room, found Overholtz already sitting there. Callaghan took the pilot's chair, Brent sat by the duplicate controls. Callaghan pressed the stud that would set the alarms to ringing. He gave those below time to get into their acceleration couches, then pressed the master key of the interplanetary drive. *Collector* lifted, rising on stilts of fire. In the control tower the Port Captain watched her go while a clerk made entries in a book.

"Wish I knew how that fellow does it," said the port captain at last. "Used to be a junior officer with I.S.M.—and look at him now. His own ship, a private army—did you see 'em?—and the Lord knows what else—"

"He'll go too far, Captain," said the clerk.

IV

IN THE beginning the voyage was nothing out of the ordinary. It was, however, the first time that Callaghan had sailed in command, and he handled *Collector* with an old-womanish care that made Brent sneer. Brent, however, did not offer to take over any of Callaghan's duties.

"I'm enjoying this," he admitted. "The old Red Setter playing at mail liner captains, and me just a passenger. . . Go to it, Red Setter. Gather ye rosebuds while ye may."

Callaghan took *Collector* up and over the round shoulder of Terra, set her nose for Achernar. He looked at Overholtz.

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"I suppose," he said, "that the Drive *is* ready?"

"Yes, *Herr Kapitan*. And why should it not be, with Overholtz himself in charge?"

"Why should it be?" countered Callaghan. "But I shan't be needing it yet. Want to build up acceleration first."

At thirty m.p.s. he cut the Martellis with his right hand, pressed with his left the switch that would put the Mannschen Drive into operation. The thunder of the rockets faltered and died, the thin, high whine of the Drive slid rapidly up the scale to the supersonic. Ahead—the bright stars blacked out as though some cosmic deity had pulled the switch. There were the usual dizziness and slight nausea, the sensation of an invisible, all but intangible, barrier suddenly yielding, the more familiar weightlessness that comes with Free Fall.

"Let her run, now, Red Setter," said Brent. "Come on down to the lounge for a spot."

"Not just yet. I want to make sure that everything's in order."

"Don't be a bloody fool. This isn't the I.S.M., you know. If you think that control's going to be permanently manned, it'll be a case of watch and stop on—with yourself as the watchkeeper. Come on."

"No, not just yet."

"All right. Come on, Overholtz. Where's Taylor?"

"He said he was feeling a little sick. He went below as soon as our *Herr Kapitan* switched over. And I must see how the Drive is running."

"Oh, all right. I'll see you both later, then."

Left to himself, Callaghan made a few minor adjustments. Then there was nothing to hold him in Control any longer—yet, even so, it was with a very real reluctance that he unbuckled himself from his chair, pulled his almost weightless body along the guide rails to the hatch. He knew that the alarms would sound in the event of any emergency, and that it was a million to one chance against such an emergency, but he wasn't happy about it. It was the first time in his life that he had left the control room unmanned.

He pulled himself through the central well of the ship, past the entrance to the lounge, from which came the sound of voices. He didn't want to join the party yet. He wanted to see what Overholtz was doing.

At the deck on which the Mannschen Drive unit was housed, he paused, then pulled himself through a doorway. A few feet along the circular alleyway he came to the door to the Drive Unit Compartment, opened it and passed inside. It took him a few moments to overcome the dizziness induced by the merest glance at those ceaselessly spinning, ever precessing wheels. And then he was aware that Overholtz was talking to him.

"I will not have this!" Overholtz was protesting. "I will not! You should have knocked."

"I should not, Dr. Overholtz. I am the master of this ship."

"Very well, then. You are, you say, the master. What do you understand of —*this?*

Callaghan looked quickly at the hazy complexity of gleaming rotation, looked quickly away.

"Not as much as you," he admitted. "But I know enough to start and stop, to apply routine tests."

"A mere bus driver!" snorted the scientist. "But you must be told sooner or later—and it is better that I, Overholtz, should tell you than the fool Brent or the fool Taylor. You see what I am doing?"

CALLAGHAN studied the little machine, all wheels set at odd angles, that Overholtz was assembling.

"It looks," he said, "like a Crawshaw Unit. But Brent said that we hadn't got one."

"For once he has spoken the truth." He paused impressively. "This is an Overholtz Unit."

"What does it *do?*"

"What does a Crawshaw Unit do?"

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"It controls temporal precession, so that ships can continue to accelerate, continue to lose reaction mass, whilst the Mannschen Drive is in operation."

"Correct—as far as you have gone. You know what happened to the first interstellar ships—the ones that got lost?"

"The general idea is that their navigators didn't understand the Drive properly, that they continued to accelerate—and got lost in Time. Using a Drive unit made to his own specifications Larsen tried to travel in Time—and he never came back."

"Larsen did not have Overholtz to help him. With this baby of mine," he patted the machine on which he was working affectionately, "he could have supped with Nero, *and* returned to tell the story."

"But Sterinsky, after Larsen's experiment, proved that Time Travel was impossible."

"A fool. They're all fools. My young friend," Callaghan stepped hastily back as Overholtz sprayed him with saliva, "when I have made enough money in this childish racket I shall build a machine to take me not to the barbaric past but to the future, to the future, do you hear? To an age where the genius of Overholtz will be appreciated."

"That'll be nice for everyone," said Callaghan. "But what does it *do*, this machine of yours?"

"It makes money," roared Overholtz. "Money that I have to share with the fools! Money that should all go to the nourishment of my genius! Now—get *out!*"

"Are you ordering *me?*"

"Easy, Overholtz," said Brent. Both men started at the sound of his voice.

"Creeping and spying," snarled the scientist. "Creeping and spying. Why ever I did with you my lot cast. . ." Tangled in his own words he lapsed into muttered incoherencies.

"Come on, Callaghan," said Brent. "He's quite harmless, really."

"I wouldn't carry him as ballast."

"Frankly," said Brent, dropping his voice, "neither would I. But we have to have him. I'll tell you all about it later. But we'll leave him to his toys."

"I don't like it," said Callaghan. "I'm master, here, and as master I refuse to leave a—madman playing around with the Drive Unit."

"He's all right, I tell you. He's forgotten more about this thing than you and I, as navigators, ever learned. Come on."

"I don't like it."

"All right, you asked for it. You're on the Register as master, but I'm owner."

"In deep space that doesn't matter a tinker's damn."

"Doesn't it?" asked Brent softly. "Doesn't it?"

He pulled a whistle from his pocket, blew a single blast. Before Callaghan had time to wonder what it was all about he felt the muzzle of a blaster digging into his back, heard a strange voice say, "Shall I shoot, boss?"

"No; damn you, Grimes. I want him. As soon as the rest of your goons come along, snap the irons on him and get him along to his quarters. Lock him up. And keep a guard posted."

"Okay, boss."

"Mutiny!" shouted Callaghan. "You'll pay for this, Brent. You may be rich, but the I.S.M. is richer. If I don't kill you first, *they'll* break you into pieces so small that they wouldn't make a square meal for a midget phagocyte!"

"Take him away, Grimes," said Brent. "I'll be seeing you later, Red Setter."

"Get out, all of you?" bellowed Overholtz. "Can I never any work do in this bedamned ship?"

IT WAS the girl, Vega Frayne, who was the first to visit Callaghan in the comfortable quarters that had become his prison. In a way, Callaghan was pleased to have her walk into the cabin. Since his imprisonment he had seen nobody but the surly, taciturn guard who brought him his meals. Yes, he was pleased, and yet her presence in the

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cabin made the hairs at the back of his neck prickle, raised gooseflesh on his body.

Vega Frayne flashed a smile to the guard who had let her in, pulled herself to a chair opposite to the one in which Callaghan was sitting, buckled herself in. She said, "What have *you* been doing?"

"What have *I* been doing? What's Brent been doing, you mean. Do you know that he's laid himself open to a charge of mutiny in deep space? And that carries a life sentence."

"He's powerful," said the girl.

"Brent? Powerful? Why, I knew him when he was a scruffy little rat who had to be bullied into taking a shower."

"And that's why he hates you, Callaghan. Just one of the reasons. He frightens me, and I'm not easily scared. I'm surprised that he let me in to see you. All that he said when I asked was, 'Go on in, my dear. This may be the beginning of a beautiful friendship—or something even better.' Then he leered in that horrid way of his."

"He let you come in because you send cold shivers down my back, and he knows it."

The girl smiled, and the smile made her normally sullen mouth beautiful. She said, "And you send cold shivers down *my* back, so we're quits. But I'm frightened, Callaghan. I feel as much a prisoner as you. I have to mix with the others at meals and they, Taylor and Brent, that is, look at me as though I were some kind of specimen, with a sort of how-many-credits-is-*she*-worth expression. Also Overholtz is completely *mad*. And that horrid man Grimes—he has his meals with us—puts me in mind of some filthy gorilla that's just itching to carry me off into the jungle and. . . Oh, I hate your guts, Callaghan—just chemistry or something. I suppose—but you're the only *man* here."

"How did you get mixed up in this swindle?"

"Through the University. Brent asked them if they knew of archaeologist willing to go on one his trips, somebody expert on the Sympat culture of Tregga. The Principal told me later that he was also most concerned about the sex and coloring of the archaeologist. He wasn't supposed to tell me all this, but he did, and we both laughed about it. 'Lost Arts is a reputable firm,' he said, 'and Mr. Brent is a gentleman.'"

"If your Principal ever comes to me for a job as personnel manager I'll fire him before he starts," promised Callaghan. "But tell me—have you actually done any work for them yet?"

"Yes. While the ship was being got ready for the trip Brent asked me about the customs of the Sympats just before their final overthrow. I wasn't able to tell him much—the Lymners destroyed almost *everything*. Then I remember Brent saying: 'Oh, weapons . . . What did they use?' He laughed then and said to that man Taylor, 'The Merchants of Death have never been short of customers, have they?'"

"What weapons *did* they use?" asked Callaghan. He wondered if the answer he received would be the one he suspected. It was. The girl said:

"Surprisingly primitive, considering their skill in other things. They had a sort of crossbow, and they'd just got around to muzzle-loading cannon. And swords, of course."

"All of which," said Callaghan, "we have in our cargo."

"But that's silly. There's been no war on Tregga since the Sympats were wiped out. And the police are armed with very efficient paralyzers. I know," she grinned. "They caught me mooching around a forbidden temple, and they brought me down at all of three hundred yards."

And so they talked, pooling their scanty knowledge, trying hard to make some kind of sense of the crazy set-up in which they had become involved. It would have been easy for them to have come to the conclusion that their employers were madmen, but the undoubted financial success of Lost Arts, Incorporated, gave the lie to that theory.

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V

FINALLY the girl said that it was time for her to go. The guard at the door leered at her as she left. She ignored him. Callaghan, sorry that she was gone, yet thankful, settled down again in his chair. He reached for a cigarette, puffed sharply to ignite it, inhaled deeply. He wanted to get the very smell of her out of his system.

Brent came in, and with him, Grimes. Both were armed.

"Don't bother to put out the red carpet, *Captain* Callaghan," said Brent. "This is just an informal visit, even though we are dressed to kill. Don't get alarmed—just joking."

"What do you want?"

"Oh, nothing, nothing. Charming girl Miss Frayne, isn't she?"

"Is she?"

"Oh, yes—you're both allergic to redheads, aren't you? A pity in some ways. Because you're going to see a lot of her."

"What do you mean?"

"I could mean all kinds of things. I could mean that you and that carroty cat are going to break your contracts as soon as we get to Tregga and wander off together, hand in hand, into the sunset."

"Rubbish!"

"Isn't it just? But that's going to be my story. After all, both I.S.M. and the University are going to wonder what's happened to two such handsome and talented members of their respective staffs."

"You swine! Are you going to murder her too?"

"Who said anything about murder, Red Setter? I give you my word," and Callaghan believed him, "that murder is very far from my intentions. After all, one doesn't kill the goose that lays the golden eggs."

"I'm not laying any golden eggs here," said Callaghan. "You engaged me as master, at well above standard rates, and I'm making the voyage as a prisoner."

"Or a first class passenger. We feed you well, don't we?"

"What the hell *are* you playing at?"

Brent didn't answer. He said, instead, "You know, Callaghan, I've always hated you, ever since we were cadets together in the old *Griffin*. You were always so damned perfect, weren't you? When any of the officers wanted anything done it was always 'Send for Callaghan; he'll make a good job of it.' And whenever I had a chance to get in with any of the more sporty passengers, it was always you who spoiled things..." He mimicked Callaghan's voice. "'I shouldn't have anything to do with that girl if I were you, old man; she'll only get you into trouble.' Oh, I could go on and on. And I know that you warned Cassila against me—"

"Are you dragging that up?" asked Callaghan. "She was a decent girl, and still is, so far as I know. She wouldn't have been if she'd got mixed up with you."

"Saint Callaghan, the beatified Red Setter. Remember when you destroyed all those solidographs I got in Port Almain?"

"The Commander had all our lockers searched after we blasted off. If he'd found those filthy things—"

"Oh, you make me sick. Come on, Grimes, let's leave the saint to his meditations. He won't be so damned saintly much longer."

They left him then, and Callaghan tried to make sense of what had been said. He was more shocked than he cared to admit by the naked hate that he had been shown. He had tried, he told himself, to help Brent. He had helped Brent. Then he remembered once, when the pair of them had had a little too much to drink, Brent declaiming upon the subject of the four freedoms. "There should be a fifth," Brent had almost shouted. "A fifth freedom. *The* freedom." "And that is?" Callaghan had asked. "The freedom to go to hell your own way," had been the reply.

A guard came in then with a meal. Callaghan picked at it, still too shaken

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by his interview with Brent to feel like eating. After the man had taken the tray there was nothing to do but sleep. Callaghan slept.

SO THE days, the timeless round of eating, drinking and sleeping, passed. Vega Frayne was a frequent visitor; and each time that she came in Callaghan was perturbed by her appearance and manner.

She was becoming jittery and her hands were never still. There were dark circles around her eyes. She asked, pointlessly, "What *do* you know?" and, each time, Callaghan countered with, "What do *you* know?" Once she said, "I like you, Callaghan," and, "I like you," he had replied. He took her hand —and dropped it as though it had been something unclean. She said, "Blast and double blast this allergy!"

There came the day when the Drive was cut, when the note of the spinning, precessing wheels dropped down the scale from the supersonic, dropped from a thin, high keening to a low, dull hum —then ceased. There was the feeling of tension, the quivering instability of every outline, the shift of colours along the spectrum. Then everything was normal again as the big Martellis poured out their decelerating blasts along *Collector's* line of flight. So far, all was routine.

Callaghan had no means of checking the period of deceleration—Grimes had taken his watch when he had been imprisoned. But it seemed that the rockets had been roaring for long enough when they were cut. Callaghan braced himself for the shock of landing. But it did not come.

The Mannschen Drive came on again, the sound of it shrilling high and higher, piercing the eardrums, the skull itself. It was, somehow, different, more painful, more gut wrenching. And then came a short blast from the rockets, abruptly starting, abruptly stopping. There was another short blast. Then another. It seemed to Callaghan that Vega Frayne, transparent and nebulous, flickered before his gaze, mouthing gibberish, drifting out backwards through the door. And there were Brent and Grimes, and the guard who brought him his meals, all moving in speeded up reverse motion. The rockets roared for a sustained period of at least ten minutes—and as they roared there was darkness, deeper than the darkness between the stars, almost solid, pressing in.

Martelli and Mannschen Drives ceased together, and this time there was no slow spinning of wheels to rest. It was brutally sudden, and in spite of his unease and wonderment, Callaghan pondered upon the problem of braking the Drive Unit, conceded that Overholtz must have *something*. But—"The *fool!*" he muttered. "He could have turned us all inside out . . ."

For the last time the rockets came on, and their dull thunder lulled Callaghan to sleep. He woke up when the door to his cabin slid open and two of the guards thrust Vega Frayne through the opening.

"What—?" he began.

"I'm a prisoner, too. And we're landing in an hour's time."

"But where? Tregga?"

"Yes," she told him. "Tregga. But all of six hundred years ago."

They landed on Tregga, and Brent was still, Callaghan admitted, a skilful pilot. For a long time nothing happened. The man and the girl sat, as far from each other as possible, and smoked, exchanging an occasional pointless remark. Once Callaghan got up and prowled around his quarters, trying to find something that could be used as a weapon. He had made the same search many times before, and with the same result. He sat down again.

The door slid open. Brent was there, and Taylor, and Grimes, and four of his men. With them stood a being roughly human in shape, approximately human in appearance. There were three eyes in the green face, and tendrils sprouted from the forehead, and the mouth was a

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vertical instead of a horizontal slit—but it was clothed, and it carried weapons—a sword and a dagger—so it could be presumed to be a rational being. It said something in a high, hissing voice, in a language unknown to Callaghan. He had visited Tregga, but briefly and on only one occasion—and, like most spacemen, he expected the inhabitants of foreign worlds to be able to speak English.

THE door slid shut, leaving the man and the girl alone again.

"What did he say?" asked Callaghan.

"A literal translation," said Vega Frayne, "would be 'Can do. But first you pay.' "

"Can do *what?*" asked Callaghan. And then the answer, the unutterably obscene answer, flashed into his brain. His face, as he looked at the girl, was deathly pale. "Have you a knife?" he asked. "A pair of scissors? *Anything?*"

"But *why?*"

"Because I'm going to kill you, and then myself. The lost art of the Sympats . . . Have you seen the specimen that a fat swine called Baker has in his museum?"

"No," she said. Then, almost screaming, "But I've heard about it! You don't mean. . . ? You *can't* mean. . . ?"

"Yes. There's another fat swine, called Grimshaw, who wants one like it, and our Mr. Brent is going to supply an almost exact replica. Or thinks he is. Steady, now. I'll be as quick as I can."

She shuddered away from him as his fingers closed about her white throat—shuddered away, then, with shut eyes and backflung head, waited. "It won't be long," promised Callaghan.

"Get him!" shouted Brent. He had come in silently, the faithful Grimes and two of his bullies with him. "Get him! Good men! But careful, careful! I don't want either of 'em messed up."

Callaghan struggled, but the sergeant and his men were too strong for him. He saw that Brent had flung the girl on the low settee, was snapping a pair of handcuffs about her wrists. In a matter of seconds Callaghan was manacled too. Grimes slapped him across the face, hard, with his open hand.

"Careful, I said," admonished Brent. "Don't damage the . . . specimens."

The "specimens" were dragged out of the ship.

Already ramps had been rigged to the cargo ports. About half of Grimes' goon squad were engaged in sliding down crates and packing cases to the waiting Sympats, the others were stationed at strategic points around the ship, squatting behind tripod-mounted heavy blasters and machine-guns.

The Sympat who had inspected the prisoners met Brent at the foot of the gangway. Arms and tendrils waving, he launched into a string of sputtering incomprehensibilities.

"He says," whispered Vega Frayne to Callaghan, "that what he has received isn't enough. He says that Brent, when he was here before, promised him fire weapons."

Said Taylor to Brent, "Why not give him what he wants? If his people *do* lick the pants off the Lymners, why should *we* worry?"

"We can't do it," said Brent. "I don't know why—better ask Overholtz. He said that we should be . . . interfering, that we should be shunting the world on to a different Time Track or something."

"Not *our* world. It wouldn't hurt *us.*"

"Wouldn't it? If these damned Sympats win the war with the Lymners, if they carry on with their lost art, how much are the specimens already in our New York vaults worth?"

"You've got something there," said Taylor. "Stall him off, somehow."

"I'll tell him," said Brent, "that just for the fuss that he's been kicking up, he'll get no more until he's done the job. Grimes! Tell your men to belay everything. And don't let these green swine lay their hands on a single cannon!"

"There's a way you *could* get over it," suggested Taylor. "Let him have half our blasters and machine-guns after the

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job is finished. Then make a free gift of the other half to the Lymners—so they cancel out!"

Brent's eyebrows went up. "Capital!"

Brent bickered for a while with the Sympat chief. Callaghan looked about him. The ship was berthed in the middle of a clearing. On all sides towered the gigantic fungi and lichens that were the predominate vegetation of Tregga until the introduction of foreign flora by the Federation ships. But it would be many a century, thought Callaghan, before the first Terrestrial survey vessel dropped through the eternal overcast. Directly opposite the main airlock a path stretched away from the ship, a path surprisingly straight and regular. And down this path, after a last sibilant exchange with Brent, the Sympat chief led the party from *Collector*. In addition to Vega Frayne, Callaghan, Brent and Taylor there were a half dozen of Grimes' men, armed with hand blasters and automatic rifles. And there were a dozen Sympat warriors carrying long, ugly spears.

Just before they vanished out of sight from the ship Overholtz appeared in the airlock. "Don't be too long," he shouted. "I cannot hold her longer than six hours!"

"We'll be back!" shouted Brent.

VI

DARKNESS came suddenly. And with the dark came light—of a sort. A wan radiance, dim and flickering, that played over the huge fungi, now blue, now green. Something flapped heavily overhead, wailing as it flew. Something else was croaking at intervals so regular that they might have been chromometer timed. The air reeked of cold, wet decay.

"And here we are," said Brent. "Take a good look, Red Setter, and you, my dear Vega. The sacred crystal of the Sympats, the hunk of God alone knows what that's going to be destroyed by the Lymners in the very near future—or a long time in *our* past, whichever way you care to look at it. But Time for you, my charming people, is going to stop."

Before them loomed the sacred crystal. It was huge, lenticulate, all of fifty feet in diameter, ten feet in thickness at its center. It was supported on rough stone pillars, each twenty feet high. It shone with a cold, cold radiance of its own, like the light of a wan, old moon reflected from a smooth, icy sea. To the right of the clearing a fire was burning—and even its flames looked cold—and half seen figures were busy about a huge black pot that was hanging over the flames.

Vega Frayne looked up. In that blue light her hair was dark, her lips were black against the pallor of her face. She looked up, and she said, "The sky has cleared."

"Yes," said Brent, "the sky has cleared. And it won't be long before Corrylla rises, it won't be long before Corrylla crosses the meridian . . . It's South Declination, just now, this queer little satellite and, as you will notice, the crystal is tilted towards the south. Tell me, Red Setter, what do you remember of Corrylla?"

Callaghan said nothing, but he remembered what he had read of the planetary system of Achernar. He remembered reading that the satellite of Tregga was radioactive in some peculiar way, that over-exposure to its rays caused a wasting away of the affected limb or limbs . . .

"Do you see what they're doing there, Red Setter?" went on Brent. "Round the fire? They're heating the crystal—it's the same composition as this big one—and they're melting it, and they'll plaster it all round you and this carroty cat here, patting it well in with their little, six fingered hands . . . And the drug they're going to give you doesn't destroy sensation . . . But cheer up! Think of Grimshaw's delight! And think of the shock he'll get when my account comes in! That should cheer you up through the long, long years of bliss! But he'll pay.

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"Here they come with the drug, now. You drink it, and you're like a clay figure. They pose you however they like. An artistic race, these Sympats. Watch Vega, now. *Hold him, you men!* And make the bastard watch!"

Callaghan saw the shadowy, nightmare figures clustered about the girl, saw one of them force her head back, raise a steaming pot to her unwilling mouth. Brent went to assist the Sympats, held her nose with one hand, forced the spout of the pot between her teeth with the other. She went limp suddenly. Brent unlocked the cuffs from her wrists, threw them down carelessly. He then pulled a knife from his belt, slit and tore all her clothing from her. She stood quiescent in the wan light of the crystal, the flickering light of the fire—no statue, for Callaghan could feel the warmth of her, could smell the fragrance of her—yet utterly motionless.

Brent pulled her to him, kissed her full on the lips.

He said, "I almost envy you, Callaghan."

He arranged her limbs and body in a wanton, provocative pose and said, "A damned pity that I have to have *you* in to spoil the picture!"

THE Sympats approached Callaghan with their pot of steaming, evil-smelling drug. Instinctively, forgetting that his legs were held, Callaghan kicked out. And his right leg was free—the guard holding it had been too engrossed in watching Brent and Vega Frayne to maintain a tight grip upon his prisoner. Encouraged, Callaghan doubled over, wrenched from right to left—and was entirely free! He kicked again, giving it direction. It caught Brent on the shelf of the jaw, and Brent began to fall, and by that time Callaghan was on him. His manacled hands sought for and found Brent's hand blaster, pulled it from its holster.

He twisted to cut down the shouting guards who were trying to pull him from their master.

And then everything happened all at once. Somebody came running into the clearing. "Brent!" he was screaming. "These devils have turned on us! They've killed all the men, and there's only Overholtz left, and he's shut himself in the ship!"

He saw what was happening, swung his blaster to cover Callaghan. Then one of the Sympat spears took him in the throat. Other spearmen were finishing off Taylor and the surviving guards. Taylor screamed for a full two minutes.

The Sympat chief approached Callaghan, holding out his hands to show that they were empty. He said something in his hissing tongue, waited for a reply. He repeated his incomprehensible words.

Callaghan turned to the girl, shook her naked shoulder. "What does he say?" he demanded.

Her voice came from very far away. "He says that you are Brent's enemy, that he will spare you because you are Brent's enemy. But you must let him have the weapons."

"Tell him that I agree, but that he must spare you too."

The chief and the girl talked for a while, then: "He is sorry. The gods would have liked a pair. But the woman is Brent's enemy, too. You are to take her, and go."

"The drug," said Callaghan. "The drug. Tell him that we must have the antidote." If there is one, he thought.

Again the sibilant question and answer; this time the chief turned to hiss orders to his people. One of them approached with another of the little, spouted pots, handed it to Vega, said something to her in his language. She replied briefly, then lifted the vessel and drained it. For a while she stood there, motionless, and Callaghan began to fear that the draught would have no effect. While he watched, one of the natives who had been stripping Brent approached, holding a little, metal key. With it he unlocked Callaghan's handcuffs.

Suddenly the girl moaned and shud-

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dered. Then she fell into Callaghan's arms, sobbing violently. He comforted her as best he could, all too conscious of the staring, curious eyes of the natives. He was aware that the chief was standing beside them, twittering urgently. The six fingered hands of the Sympats drew them away from each other and, grasping them firmly, urged them on to the path back to the ship.

But Brent, thought Callaghan. He's human. I can't . . . I mustn't leave him . . . Then: *But why not?* He grinned, unpleasantly.

AHEAD of them appeared the bright lights of the ship, the lights that shone on the crumpled bodies of Earthmen and Treggans alike. There was the smell of blood in the air, the smell of burned flesh and of gunpowder. Treggans rose from beside their weapons—some the captured machine-guns and blasters of the ship's people, some their own muzzle-loading cannon—to challenge the party.

The challenge answered, they let the man and woman and their escort pass without any opposition.

All doors and ports were tight shut, Callaghan saw, but he hoped that Overholtz was on the look out.

"Overholtz!" Callaghan shouted, "Overholtz!"

A door opened high in the metal side.

"Is that you, Callaghan? Where's Brent?"

"He's not coming back. Open up!"

"Gladly! With no pilot I cannot get away from this accursed world!" Then: "But can I trust you?"

"You'll have to. And we want you, too—to get away from this Time."

Overholtz opened the door at the head of the ramp. The girl ran up it, explained the situation to him briefly. "And you'll have to let them in," she said. "We'll give them their devilish weapons!"

"But we can't. We will change the course of history."

"We won't. How can they recharge the blasters? How can they make fresh ammunition for the guns? Out of my way! I want some clothes!"

And so the Treggans stripped *Collector* of all her armament and so, with Overholtz whimpering, "I cannot hold her for more than a few minutes," Callaghan took her up and away to the clean spaces between the stars. There was the whining of the Drive, then, and carefully timed rocket blasts to Overholtz' orders, and then Trégga lay below them again—the Tregga of their own day and age.

Callaghan threw the ship into a closed orbit around the planet, then went to his room to sleep. But sleep was not yet to come.

"What has happened to us?" asked Vega Frayne, gently stroking his face. "What has happened? At one time my touch would have made your skin crawl—not that I would have touched you."

"You've got a mole on your left hip," said Callaghan.

"So?"

"The little woman in Baker's crystal has such a mole."

"You mean. . . ?"

"We've been playing with Time," Callaghan said slowly. "It's been a cycle. It all happened once before, except that Brent won out, not we—and the crystal, Baker's crystal, lay buried for centuries until found by some archaeologist. It was too long, my dear, even with you. So we hated each other. And, hating each other as we did, a duplication of that particular pose was just impossible."

"But Baker's crystal?"

"It must have ceased to exist." Callaghan ventured to explain.

But he was wrong.

At that moment, light years away, a gross, ugly man, his face contorted with grief and rage, was staring at a transparent sphere in which, carefully posed in a grotesquely simian attitude, crouched a mannikin that bore a striking resemblance to the late junior partner of Lost Arts, Incorporated. • • •

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After the

ATOM BOMB—

What?

THE WHEEL

By JOHN WYNDHAM

THE OLD MAN sat on his stool and leaned back against the whitened wall. He had upholstered the stool elegantly with a hare skin because there didn't seem to be much between his own skin and his bones these days. It was exclusively his stool, and recognized in the farmstead as such. The strands of a whip that he was supposed to be plaiting drooped between his bent fingers, but because the stool was comfortable and the sun was warm the fingers had

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stopped moving, and his head was nodding.

The yard was empty save for a few hens that pecked more inquisitively than hopefully in the dust, but there were sounds that told of others who had not the old man's leisure for siesta. From round the corner of the house came the occasional plonk of an empty bucket as it hit the water, and its scrape on the side of the well as it came up full. In the shack across the yard a dull pounding went on rhythmically and soporifically.

The old man's head fell further forward as he drowsed.

Presently, from beyond the rough, enclosing wall there came another sound, slowly approaching. A rumbling and a rattling, with an intermittent squeaking. The old man's ears were no longer sharp, and for some minutes it failed to disturb him. Then he opened his eyes and, locating the sound, sat staring incredulously toward the gateway.

The sound drew closer, and a boy's head showed above the wall. He grinned at the old man, an expression of excitement in his eyes. He did not call out, but moved a little faster until he came to the gate. There he turned into the yard, proudly towing behind him a box mounted on four wooden wheels.

The old man got up suddenly from his seat, alarm in every line. He waved both arms at the boy as though he would push him back. The boy stopped. His expression of gleeful pride faded into astonishment. He stared at the old man who was waving him away so urgently. While he still hesitated the old man continued to shoo him off with one hand as he placed the other on his own lips, and started to walk towards him.

Reluctantly and bewilderedly the boy turned, but too late. The pounding in the shed stopped. A middle-aged woman appeared in the doorway. Her mouth was open to call, but the words did not come. Her jaw dropped slackly, her eyes seemed to bulge, then she crossed herself, and screamed. . . .

THE SOUND split the afternoon peace. Behind the house the bucket fell with a clatter, and a young woman's head showed round the corner. Her eyes widened. She crammed the back of one hand across her mouth, and crossed herself with the other. A young man appeared in the stable doorway, and stood there transfixed. Another girl came pelting out of the house with a little girl behind her. She stopped as suddenly as if she had run into something. The little girl stopped too, vaguely alarmed by the tableau, and clinging to her skirt.

The boy stood quite still with all their eyes upon him. His bewilderment began to give way to fright at the expression in their eyes. He looked from one horrified face to another until his gaze met the old man's. What he saw there seemed to reassure him a little—or to frighten him less. He swallowed. Tears were not far away as he spoke:

"Gran, what's the matter? What are they all looking at me like that for?"

As if the sound of his voice had released a spell the middle-aged woman came back to life. She reached for a hay fork which leaned against the shack wall. Raising its points towards the boy she walked slowly in between him and the gate. In a hard voice she said:

"Go on. Get in the shed."

"But, Ma—" the boy began.

"Don't you dare call me that now," she told him.

In the tense lines of her face the boy could see something that was almost hatred. His own face screwed up, and he began to cry.

"Go on," she repeated harshly. "Get in there!"

The boy backed away, a picture of bewildered misery. Then, suddenly, he turned and ran into the shed. She shut the door on him, and fastened it with a peg. She looked round at the rest as though defying them to speak. The young man withdrew silently into the gloom of the stable. The two young woman crept away taking the little girl

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with them. The woman and the old man were left alone.

Neither of them spoke. The old man stood motionless, regarding the box where it stood on its wheels. The woman suddenly put her hands up to her face. She made little moaning noises as she swayed, and the tears came trickling out between her fingers. The old man turned. His face was devoid of all expression. Presently she recovered herself a little.

"I never would have believed it. My own little David!" she said.

"If you'd not screamed, nobody need have known," said the old man.

His words took some seconds to sink in. When they did, her expression hardened again.

"Did you show him how?" she asked, suspiciously.

He shook his head.

"I'm old, but I'm not crazy," he told her. "And I'm fond of Davie," he added.

"You're wicked, though. That was a wicked thing you just said."

"It was true."

"I'm a god-fearing woman. I'll not have evil in my house, whatever shape it comes in. And when I see it, I know my duty."

The old man drew breath for a reply, but checked it. He shook his head. He turned, and went back to his stool, looking, somehow, older than before.

THERE was a tap on the door. A whispered "Sh!" For a moment Davie saw a square of night sky with a dark shape against it. Then the door closed again.

"You had your supper, Davie?" a voice asked.

"No, Gran. Nobody's been in."

The old man grunted. "Thought not. Scared of you, all of 'em. Here, take this. Cold chicken, it is."

Davie's hand sought and found the other held out to him. He gnawed on a leg while the old man moved around in the dark searching for somewhere to sit. He found it, and let himself down

[*Turn page*]

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with a sigh.

"This is a bad business, Davie, boy. They've sent for the priest. He'll be along tomorrow."

"But I don't understand, Gran. Why do they all act like I've done something wrong?"

"Oh, Davie!" said his grandfather, reproachfully.

"Honest, I don't know, Gran."

"Come now, Davie. Every Sunday you go to church, and every time you go, you pray. What do you pray?"

The boy gabbled a prayer. After a few moments the old man stopped him.

"There," he said. "That last bit."

"'Preserve us from the Wheel'?" Davie repeated, wonderingly "What *is* the Wheel, Gran? It must be something terrible bad, I know, 'cos when I ask them they just say it's wicked, and not to talk of it. But they don't say what it is."

The old man paused before he replied, then he said:

"That box you got out there. Who told you to fix it that way?"

"Why, nobody, Gran. I just reckoned it'd move easier that way. It does, too."

"Listen, Davie. Those things you put on the side of it—they're *Wheels*."

It was sometime before the boy's voice came back out of the darkness. When it did, it sounded bewildered.

"What, those round bits of wood? But they can't be, Gran. That's all they are, just round bits of wood. But the Wheel—that's something awful, terrible, something everybody's holy scared of."

"All the same, that's what they are." The old man ruminated awhile. "I'll tell you what's going to happen tomorrow, Davie. In the morning the priest will come here and see your box. It'll still be there because nobody dares touch it. He'll sprinkle some water on it and say a prayer just to make it safe to handle. Then they'll take it into the field and make a fire under it, and they'll stand round singing hymns while it burns.

"Then they'll come back, and take you down to the village, and ask you questions. They'll ask you what the Devil looked like when he came to you, and what he offered to give you if you'd use the Wheel."

"But there wasn't any Devil, Gran."

"That don't matter. If they think there was, then sooner or later you'll be telling them there was, and just how he looked when you saw him. They got ways. . . . Now what you got to do is act innocent. You got to say you found that box just the way it is now. You didn't know what it was, but you just brought it along on account of it would make good firewood. That's your story, and you gotta stick to it. If you stick to it, no matter what they do, *maybe* you'll get through okay."

"But, Gran, what is there that's so bad about the Wheel? I just can't understand."

The old man paused more lengthily than before. . . .

"WELL, it's a long story, Davie—and it all began a long long while ago. Seems like in those days everybody was happy and good and such-like. Then one day the Devil came along and met a man and told him that he could give him something to make him as strong as a hundred men, and make him run faster than the wind, and fly higher than the birds. Well, the man said that'd be mighty fine, and what did the Devil want for it? And the Devil said he didn't want a thing—not just then. And so he gave the man the Wheel.

"By and by, after the man had played around with the Wheel awhile he found out a whole lot of things about it; how it would make other Wheels, and still more Wheels, and do all the things the Devil had said, with a whole heap more."

"What, it'd fly, and everything?" said the boy.

"Sure. It did all those things. And it began to kill people, too—one way and another. Folks put more and more Wheels together the way the Devil told

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them, and they found they could do a whole lot bigger things, and kill more people, too. And they couldn't stop using the Wheel now on account of they would have starved if they had.

"Well, that was just what the Devil wanted. He'd got 'em cinched, you see. Pretty near everything in the world was depending on Wheels, and things got worse and worse, and the old Devil just lay back and laughed to see what his Wheel was doing. Then things got terrible bad. I don't know quite the way it happened, but things got so terribly worse there wasn't scarcely anybody left alive, only just a few, like it had been after the Flood. And they were nearly finished."

"And all that was on account of the Wheel?"

"Uh-huh. Leastways, it couldn't have happened without it. Still, someways they made out. They built shacks and planted corn, and by and by the Devil met a man, and started talking about his Wheel again. Now this man was very old and very wise and very god-fearing, so he said to the Devil: 'No. You go right back to Hell,' and then he went all around warning everybody about the Devil and his Wheel, and got 'em all plumb scared.

"But the old Devil don't give up that easy. He's mighty tricky, too. There's times when a man gets an idea that turns out to be pretty nearly a Wheel, maybe like rollers, or screws, or something, but it'll just pass so long as it ain't fixed in the middle. Yes, he keeps along trying, and now and then he does tempt a man into making a Wheel. Then the priest comes and they burn the Wheel. And they take the man away, and to stop him making any more Wheels, and to discourage any other folk, they burn him, too."

"They b-burn him?" stammered the boy.

"That's what they do. So you see why you got to say you *found* it, and stick to that."

"Maybe if I promised never to—"

"That wouldn't be no good, Davie. They're all scared of the Wheel, and when men are scared they get angry and cruel. No, you gotta keep to it."

The boy thought for some moments, then he said: "What about Ma? She'll know. I had that box off her yesterday. Does it matter?"

The old man grunted. He said, heavily:

"Yes, it does matter. Women do a lot of pretending to be scared, but once they do scare, they scare more horribly than men. And you Ma's dead scared."

THERE was a long silence in the darkness of the shed. When the old man spoke again, it was in a calm, quiet voice:

"Listen, Davie, lad. I'm going to tell you something. And you're going to keep it to yourself, not tell a soul till maybe you're an old man like me?"

"Sure, Gran, if you say."

"I'm tellin' you because you found out about the Wheel for yourself. There'll always be boys like you who do. There've got to be. You can't kill an idea the way they try to. You can keep it down awhile, but sooner or later it'll come out. Now what you've got to understand is that the Wheel's *not* evil. Never mind what the scared men all tell you. No discovery is good or evil until men make it that way. Think about that, Davie, boy. One day they'll start to use the Wheel again. I hoped it would be in my time, but—well, maybe it'll be in yours. When it does come, don't you be one of the scared ones; be one of the ones that's going to show 'em how to use it better than they did last time. It's not the Wheel—it's fear that's evil, Davie. Remember that."

He stirred in the darkness. His feet clumped on the hard earth floor.

"Reckon it's time I was getting along. Where are you, boy?"

His groping hand found Davie's shoulder, and then rested a moment on his head.

"God bless you, Davie. And don't

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worry any more. It's goin' to be all right. You trust me?"

"Yes, Gran."

"Then you go to sleep. There's some hay in the corner, there."

The glimpse of dark sky showed briefly again. Then the sound of the old man's feet shuffled across the yard into silence.

WHEN the priest arrived he found a horror-stricken knot of people collected in the yard. They were gazing at an old man who worked away with a mallet and pegs on a wooden box. The priest stood, scandalized.

"Stop!" he cried. "In the name of God, stop!"

The old man turned his head towards him. There was a grin of crafty senility on his face.

"Yesterday," he said, "I was a fool. I only made four wheels. Today I am a wise man—I am making two more wheels so that it will run half as easily again. . . ."

They burnt the box, as he had said they would. Then they took him away.

In the afternoon a small boy whom everyone had forgotten turned his eyes from the column of smoke that rose in the direction of the village, and hid his face in his hands.

"I'll remember, Gran. I'll remember. It's only fear that's evil," he said, and his voice choked in his tears.

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How Green Was My Martian

By MACK REYNOLDS

All Jeri wanted to do was open a kafiz stand on Terra for visiting Martians—and when opportunity knocked he proved more than ready

ONCE there was a young loet named Jeri, who thought Mars was a kert of a place to live. He figured if he could swing a deal to get himself to Terra things wouldn't be half bad.

Jeri was hot for adventure and romance. When I say romance I don't mean he was inordinately fond of Martians of the various other sexes. Jeri didn't figure he was ready as yet to pick the brim, mador and koor of his choice. They had their charms for him, of course, but he figured his career came first.

Anyway, when he was about five decals of age he left home and hopped a freight to Terra. When he arrived a spacebull nabbed him and he spent the next sixty days in the jug.

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All this is only a build-up to one of the most remarkable careers Hollywood has ever seen.

Jeri might have landed at New Brooklyn, Casablanca, or even Mukden, but he didn't; he landed at Neuve Los Angeles which made all the difference in the world. Originally he had intended to open a hot kafiz stand for Martian tourists on Terra but it was just as well it didn't work out that way. There aren't many Martian tourists on Terra—and besides, he would have had a kert of a time finding kafiz.

AS IT was he emerged from the Neuve Los Angeles cooler to be met by an emissary from the Interplanetary Phonovision Studios, who was dressed in a slaber-hair wraparound coat with a Venusian chameleon scarf about his neck.

This character, who happened to be the third assistant to J. B. Sydney's assistant's assistant, breached a long sigh of relief when he saw Jeri. "Holy jumping zloors," he said. "Where've you been?"

Jeri indicated with his third thumb the Neuve Los Angeles jug and whistled, "In there and it's a kert of a place to be. Among other things it smells like a nork-house."

The assistant-six-removed-from-the-producer was aghast. "What did the makrons throw you in there for? No wonder I couldn't locate you. Something about immigration laws?"

Jeri shrilled, "It's a long story—but uninteresting. It seems that—"

"Some other time," the emissary said hurriedly. "I've got to get you to the studio. They've been holding up an important story conference until you arrived."

Jeri blinked an eye—the top one—at him. "You certainly work fast here."

He was hurried into a rocketcab and zipped to the studios before he hardly had time to cross his legs—that is, consecutively.

Of course the industry wasn't a complete unknown to Jeri. He had attended the showing of the second phonovision wire produced on Terra for Martian consumption and had been bewildered at the strangeness of the make-believe from the sister planet. That had been immediately before the banning of the wires.

The story had dealt with a romance between a mador and a koor, without the consent of a brim and even without the participation of a loet. Broadmindedness can be stretched too far—there is such a thing as common decency. Phonovision wires were barred from Mars, quite understandably to Jeri, being a loet himself and an average upright one at that.

At any rate Jeri was hustled through a dozen guarded gates and several offices that grew in luxuriousness as he progressed. He didn't have time to find out what was going on since his guide was the breathless sort of young man who starts at the bottom of an industry and energetically works his way in all directions without ever getting anywhere. He had no time just then for explanations.

They finally wound up in a room that reminded Jeri vaguely of a Mercurian Rathskeller but it had been decorated by a Venusian Bouncer who probably had his tongues in his cheeks as he did it.

Jeri's guide waved a hand impressively, introducing the young Martian to the three high-pressure-looking Terrans who sat there, obviously awaiting him.

"Mr. J. B. Sydney, President of Interplanetary—Mr. Melbourne, producer—Mr. Darwin, our ace director. May I introduce our new technical advisor from Mars, er . . ." He turned back to Jeri apologetically, "What was your name again?"

"Just call me Jeri," Jeri shrilled, wondering vaguely what the deal was.

"Er—exactly. The Sor Jeri, gentlemen."

Now you don't rate the title Sor on

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Mars unless you're pretty big apples and a young loet like Jeri just isn't in there. He began to protest the honor but on second thought he figured what the kert. If they wanted to flatter him—what had he to lose? Nothing, considering that he had only about six hour-credits to his name.

J. B. Sydney, an energetic little butterball man, bounced up from his tremendous chair and stretched out his hand to Jeri, who politely spit in it, afterwards noting that the phonovision head had either been raised with extremely poor manners or had had something else in mind rather than the standard Martian greeting. J. B. took out a snowy handkerchief and wiped his palm carefully. However Jeri did note that he at least turned a courteous red.

The wire magnate rubbed his plump little left hand roughly over his face and chins until the color went away, mumbling, "Give me strength. One—two—three—four . . ."

FINALLY he took a deep breath and got back to the point. "I've heard a good deal about your work in the Martian theater. Glad to have you with us, Sor Jeri." He cleared his throat importantly. "With your aid undoubtedly we'll be able to reopen the Martian market again."

Jeri had been brought up as well as any loet on Mars. His brim, mador, koor and loet were as good parents as could have been found in the Solar System. He figured courtesy always paid off, so he whistled, "I'll do what I can to help." Inwardly, he wondered how J. B. Sydney had known about his work in the Martian theater, where he had had a hot kafiz concession just before deciding to make his way to Terra.

"Excellent," said J. B., rubbing his plump hands together. "Now then, what we're trying to accomplish here is a rough synopsis for our first Martian picture in ten years. As I see it the story is about a Terran missionary for the Re-Formed Agnostic Church who goes to Mars. I see Groucho Barrymore for the missionary. What'd'ya think, boys?"

"Ideal casting, J. B.," said Mr. Melbourne, enthusiastically.

"He'll cop the award with that part, J. B.," Mr. Darwin gushed.

They all looked at Jeri, who didn't say anything.

"Good," said J. B. beaming at them. "Now, how's this? I'm just playing with words, you understand, just spitballing, and I want your honest-to-Wodo opinions. You all know I can't abide yes-men around me."

There was a murmer of indignation at the very thought. Jeri didn't say anything.

J. B. went on. "I picture this missionary finding a ship-wrecked Terran girl who's never seen a man before. She's been raised by a small Martian tribe in the south seas. She runs around in a Martian sarong. How does it sound so far, boys?"

"Where are the Martian south seas, J. B.?" asked Mr. Melbourne hesitantly.

"I didn't know there were any small Martian tribes," murmured Mr. Darwin uneasily.

J. B. glowered at them. "Don't I get anything but obstruction and argument from you guys? Do you like it or not?"

"So far it sounds colossal," said Mr. Melbourne.

"It oughta cop the award," Mr. Darwin gushed.

Jeri kept his zerto shut.

After two hours, during which time J. B. had roved up and down the room, working his ideas over verbally and earning the plaudits of his assistants, the producer shot a glance at his wrist chronomo, snorted and said, "Well, boys, that's about it for a rough synopsis. What'd'ya think?" He rubbed his plump hands together and beamed.

"Stupendous possibilities, J. B.," said Mr. Darwin. "We'll get right to work on the treatment." Mr. Melbourne nodded his enthusiastic agreement.

J. B. looked at Jeri. "Eh—Sor Jeri,

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what do you think of the story rough? Now I want it straight—anybody can tell you I'm one man that just can't stand yes-men around. Give me your honest opinion."

Jeri hopped down to the floor and made ready to leave. "I'm sorry, gentlemen," he shrilled. "Nothing that's been said here this afternoon makes sense to me. Leave me out. I think I'll just open a hot kafiz stand somewhere for the Martian tourists."

They stared at him. "A genius!" J. B. Sydney breathed.

"Goodbye," whistled Jeri and started for the door.

"Wait," said J. B. hurriedly. "Please—no temperament. All I get is temperament. We can talk contract later—maybe we can see our way to doubling your salary. For now, what would you suggest? Just a rough, of course—just toss it around."

Jeri paused and considered. "Why not make it a missionary from the Eighteenth Day Adventists who comes to Terra. He discovers a brim, a koor and finally, on a South Sea Island, a mador. It all winds up with them getting married and returning to Mars after converting half of Terra by their sincerity."

"Hmmm," Mr. Melbourne said, "I'm afraid that conversion angle wouldn't go too well with some elements here on Terra."

"It'd go fine on Mars," Jeri shrilled.

"Would either a brim, koor or mador look good in a sarong?" Darwin injected thoughtfully.

"On Mars we aren't interested in sarongs, whatever they are," Jeri whistled.

The three Terrans stared at him incredulously for a long moment. "You sure?" J. B. asked finally.

"Positive," whistled Jeri.

J. B. SCRATCHED his second chin thoughtfully. "Instead of the Martian missionary converting half of Terra, we could just wind it up with him shaking hands with members of several Terran churches and everybody saying that after all we all worship the same deity no matter what name different races might give him."

Jeri blinked his eyes, one at a time. "Which deity were you referring to?" he whistled, puzzled. "We've got forty-three on Mars. It'll be forty-four in another decal." He thought it over for a moment. "Unless, of course, they drown Marki and Ikio. That'd make it forty-two."

"Drown who?" Darwin asked weakly.

"Marki and Ikio, two of our Gods," Jeri shrilled. "There's been talk about it for some time. We always drown our Gods when we get tired of them—makes room for more, for one thing. Besides, variety is the spice of religion, we always say. Sometimes we drown the whole lot and start out fresh."

J. B. Sydney closed his eyes as if in pain. "We better leave out the religious angle," he said finally. He snapped plump fingers, as though he'd had a sudden inspiration. "How about making him a soldier of fortune who comes down to join the Foreign Legion or something?"

"You mean, to fight in wars?" Jeri whistled. "I don't think that'd go on Mars. We don't fight wars any more on Mars."

J. B.'s eyebrows shot up, "No wars?" His voice held shocked incredulity.

Jeri explained briefly. "We found out a long time ago that those countries that stayed out of the most wars were the most happy."

"You mean like Sweden and Switzerland?" Darwin murmured.

"As more and more of the Martian nations came to that conclusion, there were less and less wars. We haven't had any for a thousand decals."

"What a fantastic way of looking at things." J. B. was getting desperate. "How in kert are we going to make phonovision wires when there aren't any wars but where you do have four sexes and forty-four Gods?"

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"Forty-two when we drown Ikio and Marki," Jeri corrected helpfully.

Mr. Darwin came to his feet suddenly, inspiration on his face. "Crime," he ejaculated. "How about a crime wire, J. B.? We could do a murder mystery."

"What's murder?" Jeri shrilled.

J. B. was entranced with the idea and had already accepted it for his own. His mind was occupied with the possibilities and he answered Jeri in a detached voice. "Where one character kills another one."

"Oh," Jeri whistled. "Of course that's only allowed right after mating season."

There was a pregnant silence. Finally Mr. Melbourne ventured, "How was that?"

"On Mars you're only allowed to kill each other right after mating season," Jeri explained patiently, his tone indicating that only a child would need to be told that. "Protects the race," he added as a clincher.

J. B. ran his hand desperately over his second chin. "Suppose—suppose in the wire we had one of your—er—brims kill a—say a mador *out of season?*" He looked at Jeri almost pleadingly.

Jeri showed indications of going huffy. "After all," he shrilled, "there is such a thing as common decency. Your last wire was banned on Mars, you'll recall. Besides, who ever heard of a brim killing a mador?" He snorted —Martian style—"Brims always kill koors."

J. B. Sydney threw his hands up into the air. "All right! I leave it all to you. I give up!" He strode over to Jeri dramatically. "It's all in your hands, old man. I trust you to take over. *Shake!*"

Jeri spit into his palm politely.

AFTER J. B. had dashed from the room Jeri eyed the others uncomprehendingly. "What does he mean?" he whistled.

Melbourne explained. "It's all up to you now, Sor Jeri. He wants you to make the wire for Martian release. He's given you carte blanche."

Darwin added fawningly, "Old J. B. is getting fed up with these interplanetary wires, Sor Jeri. If you make a hit of this one he might turn over production for Mercury, Venus, Saturn and Jupiter to you as well."

The third assistant to J. B. Sydney's assistant's assistant stuck his head in the door. "Say," he said breathlessly, "there's a Martian out here who says his name is Sor Wari. Says he has an appointment with J. B. in regard to making the new Martian wires."

Jeri was catching on to the ways of Hollywood fast. "Don't bother J. B. with it," he whistled. "I'm taking over the Martian productions. Just throw the makron out. He's probably some space bum."

J. B.'s assistant, six removed, withdrew his head and Jeri turned back to the others. "Now, then," he shrilled, "let's get to work."

It was two decals later and Jeri was bouncing back and forth on his heels, puffing in satisfaction on a Mercurian kapu which he held clenched tightly in his zerto. He was wearing a slaber-hair wraparound coat and about his neck was the loudest colored Venusian chameleon scarf ever seen on Mars. Before him the beams of a multitude of neo-zeon lights searched the Martian skies. Mobs thronged about the colossal theatre.

J. B. Sydney, who had rocketed up from Terra to be at this grand premiere, was saying to him, admiration and even a certain humbleness in his voice, "I don't see how you do it, Sor Jeri. This is the tenth straight smash hit."

Darwin was there too. He gushed, "Besides, you don't even use Martian actors. They're all Terrans and the show looks just about the same as any other Earth wire—except, of course, you dub in the Martian voices and the titles and credits are all in your own language."

"Come on, break down, Sor Jeri," J. B. pleaded. "What's the secret of your success?"

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Jeri took the kapu from his zerto and tapped the ash off its end. "It's simple, boys," he whistled. "Do you happen to know the name of this wire?"

They shook their heads. "Can't say as I do," J. B. confessed. "It's all in Martian, of course."

"Translated, it's *Blondie Gets the Nose Bleed,*" Jeri shrilled in satisfaction. "The last wire I made was *Andy Hardy Goes to Sing Sing.*"

The two Terrans frowned. "I don't get it," Mr. Darwin confessed. "I still don't see why such pictures are hits."

Jeri beamed at him from his top eye. "Don't you understand? I just make a film that shows a typical day in the life of a typical Terran family. Up here on Mars it goes for comedy, for farce—er—you know, burlesque."

He gestured to the crowds of brims, madors, koors and loets swarming into the theatre. "They know it's utterly fantastic but they love it."

J. B. Sydney could recognize genius when he saw it. He held out his hand impulsively.

Jeri was always courteous.

THE ETHER VIBRATES

(Continued from page 8)

the story to let us know that there would have been dire consequences in the entire kaboodle of worlds if the mission of Elspeth and Mack had failed. That's dirty development. Ya could have kept our teeth chattering all through the story; given us one more question in our minds (the more questions the better is my philosophy) to be answered. Why did you do it? Nevertheless, I've seen worse in all of the stf mags. (Yea, I know your office is awfully high up.)

You aren't the only one who bum-fuzzled his story. The experienced, prolific John D. MacDonald just sliced off the thread of his story in what was practically a mid-scene. It just ended. There wasn't anymore. And it's quite frustrating to believe that there should be more to a story and, yet, know there's not. I don't mean the feeling of sorrow that a story is ended, I mean the one that it's just not all there. As I said, it's frustrating.

But you did have some good stories in this September issue; "This Way To Mars," "Yes, Sir," and "The Last Story." The latter was more impressive than the first two. I like these little off-trail things you come up with occasionally. Somehow, they seem more like fanzine stories than pro-tales. Yet they're usually able to hold their own with the stories by the famed pro-writers. Keep using all you can get if you find that nobody important disagrees on their use. I think most fen will love 'em!

I won't comment on what made "This Way To Mars" and "Yes, Sir" fairly good and "The Masquerade On Dicantropus" run-of-the-mill science fiction, partly because I don't know what it was, and partly because I've got to close.

Keep it just the way it is. — *"T" Division, Submariner Administration, Mare Island, California.*

P. S. Has Murray Leinster gone full-time to the slicks? I haven't seen anything by him in TWS, SSS, or FSQ since "Planet Of Small Men". He used to be one of my, favorite authors and I was very glad that he was so prolific. I don't think you stop being THAT prolific over night. What happened? You didn't start giving HIM rejection slips . . . !

Did you say you were in the Navy? And turning up your nose at lewd, provocative wenches? Shades of Farragut. Bergey will probably never recover from this blow. Anyway, what do you think of the new, *new* covers? The ones without any women, lewd, provocative or otherwise?

COMPLETE WITH DIALECT

by Willie Miller

Dear Sam: Is coming the time in every fan's life when he (she, it) should be taking pen in hand and writing to favorite editor. Yes, you I'm meaning! (Is meaning Merwin—Ed.)

Just bought the Sept. ish today and have few choice "syllollables" about the cover.

As Jerry Lewis and Dean Martin would say: "I like it! I like it!" And I *do* mean I like it! But definitely.

S'wonderful. S'great. Kinda classy you might say. However, I *always* like your covers. And to M. Cox I say, "Foo!" So she's shocked. So for that we should have no gorls mebbe? It isn't the cover that's so terribly important. The stories are terrific and thass whut counts.

You have a swell 'zine, S. M. I like it! I like it!

Oh yeh—to Miss (?) Bracket for STARMEN OF LLYRDIS—I'm bowing from mine ankles to you. — *VR-1 N.A.S., Patuxent River, Md.*

For Merwin, I'm bowing too. So is both of us making like a couple penguins. STARMEN OF LLYRDIS was terrific. So you know what? We got another terrific deal com-

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ing up next month—VULCAN'S DOLLS by Margaret St. Clair. Get some liniment for your back, etc., you'll be bowing from your toenails.

CLOUDY FUSTIAN
by L. Sprague De Camp

Dear Sam: Re the Coles and their Lysenkoan Marxist (SS Sept. 51 p. 140) the proper answers would have been: "No, have *you* read the original Lysenkoan sources either?" (Unless the man can read Russian he couldn't have; the best he could do would be a translation, abstract, or paraphrase.) Then: "Well, have you read the original sources on the work of modern Western geneticists: Morgan, Dobzhansky, Huxley, etc.?" I have read translations of Lysenko's speeches and as far as one can tell from his cloudy fustian, his theory (originally developed by Michurin) is mere Neo-Lamarchism, long since discredited elsewhere. He made his reputation by introducing to Russian agronomy the practice of vernalization, invented by an American about 90 years ago. And why get indignant about "alienating American liberals?" The Communist aim is not objective truth but political power; not to conciliate American liberals but to exterminate them, so the more they pervert their science and kill their scientists, the better for us. — *Wallingford, Pa.*

This is an argument that started before our time, so we don't intend to get our feet wet by leaping in uninvited. We can't resist the temptation to choose sides to some extent—having been the victim of many an evening of comradely propaganda and logic we have a better than average familiarity with their reasoning and methods. And we agree that the meat of the whole business is in Sprague's final sentence. You can't work with the boys because they'll tolerate you only so long as you are going their way. To an honest liberal (and if you want a definition, let's say a liberal is interested in objective truth as close as any such thing can be detected) the distortion of truth to preconceived ends is intolerable.

AND ANOTHER
by Dr. John D. Clark
Chief Chemist, Naval Air Rocket Test Sta. Lake Denmark, N. J.

My Dear Sam: My heart is bleeding and my blood boils about the troubles of Les and Es Coles, who find difficulty in refuting the arguments of a Marxist advocate of the theories of Lysenko. They complain that they were unable to argue when said advocate asked, "What do you know about the work that Lysenko has done? Have you read the original sources?"

Well, the obvious answer would have been, "Have you?" But, somehow, the Messers Coles seem to have overlooked that. Furthermore, there seems to be no overwhelming reason why Coles et Cie should *not* have read the original Lysenko reports. They are available, in translation, in every library in the US above the drugstore level, and there is nothing in the world to prevent the Coles brothers from reading them—if they can wade through the drivel.

For I, for my sins, have read them. And they are, honest to God, the lousiest reports that I have ever read on any program of experimental work. They consist of the worst combination of uncontrolled and sloppy experiments with bad reporting that I have ever had the misfortune to meet. I swear that if a P-1 junior chemist presented me with a job like that I would not only fire him but would boil him in oil to encourage the others. I've been in the chemistry business for twenty five years, and I should know the quality of a report when I see it. And, by the ghost of Lavoisier, that work of Lysenko's is not only sloppy but dishonest. To those who doubt—acquire the necessary training, then read it.

But the main point is not the accuracy or lack of it in Lysenko's alleged work. It is that there is an official scientific (sic) theory in the USSR, laid down as an unquestionable dogma. And to make it worse, the theory was made official by non-scientists, for political reasons, on the assumption that scientific facts *must* agree with political theory. That is the negation of science—in fact, of thought. In science, the experimental facts come first—and if they disagree with a theory, it's tough on the latter. The action of the USSR in applying dogma to science is a return to the absolutist barbarism of the middle ages, when Galileo was tried for saying that the earth moved, and to the fantastic stupidity of Kant, who insisted that philosophy proved that only seven planets could exist, and that a search for more would be futile. True science consists of making theories fit the facts—not of butchering the facts to make them fit the theories. In short—*there is and can be no unquestionable theory.* If it may not be questioned it is not science.

And finally, I am unable to see any plausible reason why Les and Es Coles should blame the editor of SS. for their own deficiencies in argument. — *Denville, New Jersey.*

Amen. And if you can take the long, long view, there is nothing much to worry about in totalitarianism, for it carries the seeds of its own destruction within it, as it murders its best brains and talents. The only trouble is that you can't always afford to take the long, long view when human beings are meanwhile being maimed, warped, tortured, distorted or murdered. It may be that the comrades are right in one thing—you've got to take a stand.

EENIE-MEENIE
by Jan Romanoff

Dear Sam: The September issue of SS was a sight for sore eyes. For some inexplicable

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reason all the s. f. mags down here have been running two to three weeks late. A predicament which when happening to me is like depriving Bergey of his collection of Petty semi-nudes.

HOUSE OF MANY WORLDS' in my, no doubt, worthless opinion was the best novel you have published since John D. MacDonald's WINE OF THE DREAMERS. It seemed I could detect a faintly cynical air about it though. Sort of a "to hell with everyone but me" attitude. I rate the rest of the stories in their exact order of appearance.

THE ETHER VIBRATES was pitifully dull this time. Including that silly conglomeration of hock by one Chuck Jesse, who seems to be just a few steps ahead of the paddy wagon.

One of your more astute followers, Shelby Vick, seems to have stirred up a mild controversy. However, I wouldn't say *all* fem fen are—ah—homely, just ninety-eight percent of them. Yes, I'll side with Shelby. That is unless Joe Gibson would care to send me a pic of that gorgeous Manhattan model he contends reads s. f. Then and only then will I turn my guns on Shelby.

My thanks to Mr. Beck, who for once forgot to mention his huge collection and the "American Science Fantasy Society."

Robert Marlowe seems particularly adept at taking up a lot of space to say practically nothing. You might know he would ask for trimmed edges. If the preceding doesn't provoke a rebuttal from Mr. Marlowe, I'll be disappointed.

A letter by one J. L. Zwirner contained a good suggestion. I don't see any good reason preventing SS and TWS from becoming monthly. Or even combining to form a monthly. How about it?

Heartily approve of your new method of rating the fanzines. Glad to see "Quandry," the most humorous 'zine I've ever read, in the upper bracket. — *26601 So. Western, Lomita, Cal.*

For Joe Gibson's latest, see the next issue of TWS. And for another, and more literary comment on Chuck Jesse, see below.

PSIANTIFIC STUFF
by Don Michard

Mi Deer Mr. Merwin: Please ekskuse me printing in pensil kuz I'm a ignerant-yungstir (16 yrs) and kant rite with a pin.

Just bot yur Sept. ish of SS and red the letters. Wie the hek dou yu print such bad english letters like the kowpoke frum Montana. Everybudy noes that siance aint spelt with a "u".

Now doun to bisnis. Eye see that yur noval appears in Sept. ish. It better be gud. Eye didn't reed the book yet but the kuver is a sakrälese. Eye red stf for almost 4 yrs and eye noe that roket ships in space just coast. (no frickshun you noe) in frea flite. Oar are they still in the atmosfear? (Yur ships got exaust behind.)

Eye think that your mags are among the Ist raters. Pleeze moar interplanitarie (whew big werd) cuvers.

P. S. Eye still think that Montana kowpoke aught tew lern the fundymentals of Inglish.

Thanks, Don. If you sat in an editorial chair all day, you'd be exhausted too.

FAINT PRAISE
by Grafton K. Mintz

Dear Sam: You didn't print my last blast, you dog, but I'm still trying. First of all, I'd like to correct rather a large error which you made in your editorial for the September SS. Genghis Khan died some time before the Mongols invaded Europe. His son Ogadai succeeded him, and his grandson Batu led the Mongol armies in their invasion of European Russia and Poland, while Ogadai stayed in his great pavilion by lake Baikal, earnestly endeavoring to drink himself to death. He succeeded just as the Mongol armies were getting ready to take Budapest (they never reached Vienna) and, according to tribal custom, everybody had to go back home forthwith and elect a new Khan. Tribal custom proved stronger than military ambition, and the Mongols left Europe, never to return.

Genghis Khan and his successors were never any more attached to Nestorian Christianity than to any other religion, though the rulers favored a primitive species of ancestor-worship. Representatives of most of the great religions of the period and region were always to be found side by side in the Mongol camps. They got their reputation for favoring Nestorianism from the Moslems, who are incensed that the great Khans tolerated the infidel, and to whom toleration of any religion but their own meant favoritism.

For further information I refer you to "Genghis Khan" and "The March of the Barbarians," both by Harold Lamb.

Now for the stories. I rate yours highest, Sam, but don't start preening yet, because that doesn't mean I rate it high. You had a good tight plot—somewhat van Vogtish—but your characterization was less that it might have been. What bothered me most about "House of Many Worlds" was the absence of any genuine emotional impact arising from the relationship of the characters. You did, to be sure, keep your readers' interest by encouraging them to expect the preliminary necking to begin at any moment, but the stirring of the genuine Eros was strangely absent. Elspeth and Mack retained their attitudes virtually unchanged until almost the end of the story, and then suddenly switched. To me, it was very unconvincing.

Furthermore, I found Elspeth a vain and pretentious woman, and Mack tedious. Surely you must be able to do better than this.

For the rest, "The White Fruit of Bandalar" was a nice, ghastly little item, and "The Last Story" was beneath contempt. The others were just so-so.

Did you really mean it when you said that a magazine of the type suggested by the Coles would have you snoring in a week? I had thought better of you than that. — *1200 E. 82nd St., Cleveland, Ohio.*

P. S. Why don't you suggest to Finlay—tactfully of course—that his bubble-dancer has been around an unconscionably long time? I think it's about time he got a new illustration.

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What's so reprehensible about maintaining that a story should be a story, not a lecture? In any writing period there are always two kinds of writers:

(1) the kind who stops his story at any inconvenient point and proceeds to explain all the past history, family affairs, business relations, habits, tastes and so on of his characters, throwing in a description of their complete wardrobes, favorite restaurants and opinions on world affairs, cocker spaniels and the Dodger's chances of winning the pennant. When this type is turned loose on a science story the result is exactly like the text book written by a professor in a small college which would sell exactly three copies were it not mandatory for the unfortunate students who took his course to buy one.

(2) the writer who has a story to tell, who never stops for long explanations, but knows the technique of dropping information as he goes, of letting the characters toss the reader, through their dialogue, a concise but meaty digest of what they're up against. This is writing. It can be as literary as you like, but it never loses sight of the fact that the story comes first. If you'll go along with that we may turn out to be on the same side of the fence after all.

LOUD PRAISE
by Emory H. Mann

Dear Sam: I looked all over the magazine, STARTLING STORIES, for your name as the editor, but have failed to find same. This after the mention of it in the letters in the Sept. issue. I see the mention of the editor plenty of times, but no name seems to be attached, so I guess you have again become disembodied!

Anyway, for the first issue of your 24th year of publishing STARTLING STORIES, you sure put out a humdinger!

The novel, HOUSE OF MANY WORLDS, by this same aforesaid Sam Merwin, Jr., if he's the same guy, takes all the laurels, plums, Oscars, or what have you that you or any other may think up. It was right up my alley! I've read it twice already, and will probably do so yet "again, and again!"

William Gault's "This Way To Mars" rates second. Liked it very much.

H. B. Fyfe's "Yes, Sir!" was certainly different. Imagine a robot which would act just the way the people around it expected it to! I wonder what would happen if a person with a strong personality expected it to be efficient and capable of numerous things, and a person who expected the worst were with the robot at the same time! What would the robot do then? Ask Fyfe about that?

I liked the other stories, too. Not as well, but I liked them.

Oh yes, not the least to be mentioned are Virgil Finlay's illustrations for your story, *House of Many Worlds*. None other have I seen who could make a woman look more like a woman or more desirable—a veritable dream girl or woman!

I think that Peter Poulton's illo for *The White Fruit of Banaldar* is the best of his illos that I have seen.

Guess that's all for this time—nothing controversial. Just a particularly good issue. — *R. F. D. No. 1, West Townsend, Mass.*

This same aforesaid Sam Merwin Jr., is without a doubt Sam Merwin Jr. We know that's a load off your mind. And he is not disembodied, we can vouch for that. He is, in case there is anybody left who hasn't heard, now a full time free-lance author, having teleported himself out of these precincts to turn out more houses of many worlds.

BATTLE HIM OF THE REPUBLIC
by J. O. Curtis

Ethergrams Editor: Just read HOUSE OF MANY WORLDS in September, 1951, issue. It is very good—nice ideas, well presented. Surprise ending was tops. Know it took courage to print the story in view of the love interest, but must congratulate you on having the required courage. Keep it up. This *is* America. — *831 Del. Ave., S.W., Washington 4, D.C.*

Oh, we've got courage all right. We've got courage we haven't even used yet. Just so long as we're sure this is America . . .

THE ETHER EXCHANGES
by Karl Klondike

Dear Sir: Sure glad to write you for this first time. Want to tell you what I think of the latest stuff in SS. THE DARK TOWER was real meaty stuff for my dough. I do like these kind. THE WOMAN FROM ALTAIR was also right down my avenue and I hope someone writes another tale along similar lines soon as there are quite a few possibilities there. I am one of your silent readers, this being my first note to an editor since I hit Argosy with a couple of missives a long time ago. Been with STF&F for many years; from 1932 on, in fact. What I want is some exchanges. For stamps and for science fiction magazines, some dating back to 1932. Can you drop me into THE ETHER VIBRATES to see if I can do any good? Won't bother you for a long time again. — *Harrisburg, Illinois.*

Sure thing, Karl.

LOST AND FOUND
by R. H. Stringham

Dear Editor: I have been reading your ma-

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gazine for some time and find that you come up with quite a few good stories. This is my first letter to a magazine. Incidentally I have a favor to ask. There was a past issue of your magazine that contained a story by Edmond Hamilton called FORGOTTEN WORLD. The main character's name was Laird Carlin, I had a copy of this issue once but I lost it and desire greatly to get another copy for that story. Could you send me a copy if you have one on hand and if not, ask your readers if any have that issue I want?

The issue you want is THRILLING WONDER STORIES for Winter, 1946, and I'd be glad to send you a copy if you had put your address on the letter. But you didn't, so nobody's going to be able to send you anything until you write in again and give your address.

OLD BUBBLE-BATH MORSE
by Bill Morse

Sir: As I said once before, one of the types of STF that I really enjoy reading is that depending upon a mysterious door in time and/or space. So you offer us this month not one but an apparently infinite number of them. I takes off my hat to you.

Judging by the style, this is your own work—not some-one else using one of the staff names. At least, it bears several of the imprints of the writer of a couple of pocket-books attributed to Sam Merwin Jr., by which I mean a tendency to over-write, a habit of exactness in choice of words and a rambling, day to day story that somehow gets across better than stuff which is mechanically perfect. I cannot claim to have any clues on the working of the female mind (heaven forbid!) but was beginning to wonder how you would explain Elspeth's logic: how neatly you did that! She came from another world altogether—that was the only explanation, after all.

On the whole, I liked it for the new twist on an old theme and the attention to detail; the fact that it also brought back old Bubble-bath Finlay (to whom be glory for ever) and ended with the U.S.A. back in the fold is purely incidental (I hope). Do you plan to give us more?

Jack Vance, I see, is having woman trouble. Let Gault explain to him how to take care of that. May I never live to see the day when that tale comes true! Can you imagine yourself working for Matilda Glutz? Ah, well, there is still a DiMaggio on the Yankee team.

H. B. Fyfe had such a neat idea that I had to read it twice before I saw what he was getting at. Once the point struck home, I sat back and giggled helplessly till a neighbouring reader came in, even more puzzled. He didn't think it funny even when I had calmed down and explained it in words of not more than four letters. No accounting for different senses of humor, is there?

For the rest, MacDonald is appropriately gruesome and Samalman makes a fair try at a Bradbury tale.

Your own Vibrating Ether holds the idea that I have been trying to belt into the skulls of a few hot-headed types here: that every part of the future depends upon the actions of individual men, in the present. I fail to see why that elementary point is not more obvious in a supposedly civilised world.

Now that the Coles have left us, for overly-casuistic reasons, I feel it is time to state that I, for much the same reasons, intend to stay. If you can restrain your relieved hysterics, I'll explain. If your stories were heavier on the science, we would have little more than chapters composed of calculations and deductions. As for literature, I say: Bradbury; Brackett; St. Clair; Hamilton. . . . Hell! what more do you expect for a Buck, let alone two-bits? And I felt a stir of amusement at the implications of the anti-penultimate sentence: "more mature, and appeal to such as we". Where do they get that "we are more mature than you" stuff? I must admit that your farewell heaped Coles of fire on their heads, and no doubt they will buy this issue to see what you say. Nice work, Sam.

Incidentally, I began reading SS and TWS with much the attitude of superiority that they have now. The average person looks upon anything connected with Pulp Mags as being inferior in intelligence (and just about anything else). I did, too, till the last three years, when I have had a regular diet of STF. It has been impressed upon me by solid weight of evidence that the writers, both of the stories and the letters, have in the main the mature viewpoint that the Coles cannot see. We cannot all, I suppose, be Ph. D.'s, but mere possession of such a degree does not presuppose the ability to employ the knowledge it requires, nor is it a guarantee of superior intelligence.

To be really exact and blushmaking, the original condescending air with which I read STF has developed almost into a kowtow before the ability of your authors and the intelligence of most of your readers. NOT, I would add, because they agree with me, but because when they disagree I find, upon sober reflection, that I was either prejudiced or misinformed. It has, on the whole, been a good thing for me, and, if only for that reason, I flatly refuse to leave you. You yourself, Sam, slapped me down good and hard once, anent robot stories. On careful consideration, I believe that you were right. My head, though bloody from that skirmish, is still unbowed (apart from a tendency to round-shoulders, which dates back to an abortive attempt at married bliss) because I intend to give you more opportunities to repeat that slapping down whenever I leap to this confounded typewriter (which I cannot control yet).

On the whole, Sam, your twin magazines are still about the best in the field. Sure, you slip up now and then; so do the New York Yankees. But what a bench you have! I should add that I am not the Lemuel Craig who rates you so highly in Eusi's latest issue, but he and I see eye to eye on that point. Keep it up, please. You have always rated "A" for effort, if not in final result.

See you at Nolacon, I hope. — *W. E. E. (RAF Signals) RCAF Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.*

We have harped upon this theme before—that stf, having gone through a lot of growing pains, is no longer pulp fiction, judged by the same considerations as other types of pulp.

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And that is important. It may be something of what the Coles are driving at: that we must get as far as possible from the Flash Gordon school of writing to show that stf is not just wild adventure with no restrictions on the author's imagination, but that it has a theme, a mission——a soul, if you will.

Don't get us wrong on the "mission" angle. We don't mean sermons. But every serious piece of work has some kind of intention, or message, or what have you. The author wouldn't have written it if there weren't something he wanted to get off his chest. And stf has that kind of mission—it is sort of an advance guard for a lot of things to come: the kind of world we might like to see, the kind of people we might like to be. And it sounds warnings and points with pride and views with alarm and all the rest of it. Also it can be pure entertainment, without an ulterior thought in view. Or it can be any combination of all of these. Gesundheit.

THIS HUNGRY WORLD

by R. L. Farnsworth

Pres. U. S. Rocket Society

Ye Edde: Let us settle this SMILODON or EUSMILUS deal once and for all. This sabre-tooth beauty was not a "tiger" nor did it become extinct because of its ever-growing canine development. In fact, EUSMILUS of the early Oligocene, tended to have some what larger canines than its great, great (ad infinitum) grand children, SMILODON, of the late Pleistocene.

For authority let me quote George Gaylord Simpson, who wrote "The Meaning of Evolution". —"To characterize as finally ineffective a mechanism that persisted without essential change in a group abundant and obviously highly successful for some 40,000,000 years seems quaintly illogical!"

It is very possible that the sabre tooth, like the giant sloth and other numerous animals of the Pleistocene, faded away due to radical changes in food supply, possibly caused by early man. In addition there is very good evidence that early man did not only encroach upon the food supply of larger mammals but without question exterminated many of them himself; just as he continues to do today. (If you doubt this go to any Library and look up dinner menus in hotels a hundred years ago). Where, now, are all these game dishes and seafoods, so plentiful a hundred years ago? And while on that subject, remember that America's insatiable appetite for shrimp is pushing that succulent crustacean towards the limbo of the past. Not mentioning what pollution of sea shores and rivers is doing to our ancient sources of succulent tid-bits:

It is very probable that fifty years from now many items we enjoy today will be forever lost to us. Including shrimp, oysters, crabs, lobsters, chestnuts and many, many others. Even oranges are getting smaller and apples and potatoes are losing their taste.

The analytical efforts of modern science are tremendous, but to date its conservation powers have been only noticeable by their absence. Our living standard is declining at an alarming rate; and it can not be upheld by television sets and automobiles. Few American families have a single thing in their homes today of any intrinsic worth. And before you run me down with statistics remember that in the fifty years of which I speak the population of the world may have doubled again.

The huge Sabre-Tooth who is looking over my shoulder and cleaning his canines with his great paws, has just suggested that the only solution, and one good for more eons than can ever matter to us, is THE CONQUEST OF SPACE!—*Box 29, Glen Ellyn, Ill.*

This is an alarming prospect indeed. It appears as if mankind's voracious molars will indeed denude the planet unless the conquest of space becomes a reality. Failing that the only recourse would seem to be cannibalism, for at the rate mankind is breeding, the only creature he will not be able to eat out of existence is himself. Anybody want to start a budding cannibal society?

THE WISHING WELL

by Charles Baird

Dear Mr. Mines: I have an unusual request to make. Change your price to 35 cents. As you know, many of your competitors have raised their prices. This change will enable them to present better quality if they wish.

As SS and TWS are my favorite mags, I do not wish to see their quality deteriorate due to a lower price. With the higher price, your budget would doubtlessly be increased.

My only comment on your recent issues is: they are tops.

Your present policy for SS is to present a novel of about 45,000 words, I believe. I would like to see your policy changed to a 60,000 to 80,000 word novel each issue. The shorter novels (30,000 to 45,000) could be presented in TWS.

I would also like to see more framed full-page drawings illustrating our mags. I believe the feature novel should contain more illustrations interspersed through the story. (At least five is desirable.)

I wish you would consider for FSM or WSA the early novels from WONDER and its quarterlies. The early novels from SS are worth reprinting, but so are many of the Gernsback stories. I would like to see any Gail, Hanstein or any other foreign authors represented. Some novels I would especially like to see are SHOT INTO INFINITY by Gail, BETWEEN EARTH AND MOON by Hanstein, BROOD OF HELIOS by Bertin, THE TIME STREAM by Taine and FINAL WAR by Sphor. But please, after you finish the soon-to-be-current string of novels from SS, go back to WONDER.

If any of you fans reading this in the Springfield area are interested in getting together, get in touch with me.

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Mr. Mines, I would greatly appreciate it if you will list the former editors of SS, TWS, CF, and STRANGE STORIES with their tenure of office. (Before Merwin.) Thanks a lot.

How about reprinting some of the stories from STRANGE? You have a virtual gold mine in the thirteen issues that were published. I would like to see some of Kuttner, Friend, etc., from that mag. For one selection I would like to see THE CITADEL OF DARKNESS.

Sam Merwin was very successful as editor. My only wish is that you can do as good a job. Your background (forgetting the westerns) seems to indicate that you'll do a swell job. Lots of luck.—*161 Albemarle St. Springfield, Mass.*

There's something nice about that letter. Apart from the personal expressions of good will and all that, there is a completely unselfish interest in the magazines and in the job we're trying to do of getting out the best collection of stories each month that we can dig together. For that, thanks.

As to your requests: Nobody would disagree with you. We'd sure like to see longer stories, more illustrations and so on. But I'm afraid you've got an optimistic idea of what an extra dime a copy would do. Some, but not all of that, and we hate to raise the price. Everybody's raising prices. The new issue of the Sears, Roebuck catalog, long regarded as a barometer of prices, shows just about everything up quite a chunk—and just when we thought it was going to quit. If our costs continue to go up, we'd get nothing at all for the extra dough.

As to the other questions — in reprints everything is grist for our mill. There's some foreign stuff in prospect—DEATH OF IRON by S.S. Held, translated by Fletcher Pratt, is in the cards for Wonder Story Annual and all the early issues of our own magazines are being read. You're likely to run across many of your favorites.

As to former editors, reading from front to back: before Merwin was Oscar Friend, who went back to 1940 and before him was Mort Weisinger, who went back from 1940 to 1936 when we took over from Gernsback. There haven't been many. Couldn't say how many more there will be. Can you forget westerns?

JUST A DREAMER
by Gordon Gibson

Dear Merwin: I see that your name is no longer on the title page. How come? I, for one, thought that your name looked a lot better on the title page than that *Startling Oddities*. (Ugh, that name. Call it Merwin's Marvels or something equally ghastly).

I'm sorry to see Les & Es Cole are leaving TEV. But I completely agree with them when they state that they like their stories heavy on the science and literature. After all, look at the name "Science Fiction." It means just what it says. But the problem is, which of the words is the adjective. Should Science be a slave to fiction or visa versa? Here is my opinion for what it is worth. I think that whenever you get a good technical story, no matter how scientific it may get, put it in. Maybe they would average about one to the issue. And if you ever get a very well written story, even if it is fantasy, by all means put it in. They also would average about one or two to the issue. The main thing is, follow a middle of the road policy, and don't favor either side. At the present, with a few exceptions, it seems that you are favoring the fiction but the trouble is that it is usually not even well written fiction. The editors problem is, I believe to sell the magazine to the greatest number of people, and at the same time keep up the standard. It seems that lately, you have been selling a great many mags, but that your standard has gone way down from your former forty-seven, forty-eight high.

Now to the stories. Merwin! Where have you been all these years? I never knew you could write like this. You may not be the best editor in the world but you sure can write. *House of Many Worlds* was great. A true classic. Magnificent. There was only one thing wrong with the whole story. Why did that slob Everad have to blow Juanna to bits? It would have been a much happier ending to have had Mack marry Juanna and have pawned Elspeth off on Marshal Henry. Still, it was a great story. *This Way to Mars* was also good. Except I still doubt that a movie star would like a clerk. Jack Vance's story was way below his usual standard. And in my opinion, Yes, Sir, Stunk. *The White Fruit of Balandar* was nothing exceptional, but I thought that *The Last Story* was really a fine piece of writing. All in all it was a good issue.

Now to the query dept. Why don't you get stories by VV., Hamilton, Kuttner, and Fearn? Also, how about some more stories by Rene LaFayette? There is one thing that I am curious about. Is John D. MacDonald really Henry Kuttner? *Fury* appeared as a book under Kuttner's name but I am told that in the original pulp form I am told that it was under MacDonald's, whom I think, incidentally, is one of your best writers. His *Wine of the Dreamers* in SS and *Shadow on the Sand* in TWS are two of the best stories I have seen in print. But would you please put me straight on who he is.

And say, as a parting shot, why don't you change your mag to a slick, even if you have to charge 35c for it. The good cover stock would really give Bergey a chance to show off his art. His cover was excellent on the Sept. ish. There is just one thing wrong with his covers nowadays. Don't you think he is having a few too many people hiding behind planets?—*3455 Marpole Avenue, Vancouver, B. C.*

I can't recall ever bouncing a story because it was too technical. That's no problem. The worst of it can be trimmed in editing if it seems

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to slow down the story excessively. So there is really no argument about "science versus fiction". The only problem is getting enough good stories to make up a 48 point issue of whatever your own system of classification is. You'd be surprised at the amount of picking over you have to do.

Don't think you'll see many stories by Rene LaFayette for awhile. From what I hear, dianetics is taking up much of his time. No, John D. MacDonald is not Henry Kuttner. He is John D. MacDonald and his style isn't very much like Kuttner's, even. He is up in New York state and Kuttner is out in California. And there's a new Kuttner novel scheduled for March SS—THE WELL OF THE WORLDS—the first Kuttner novel in about four years. Are you excited?

As to our covers—well, just stick around. We don't have any inferiority complex about our stories, either.

GOOD, BUT—
by James Gibbs

Dear Sam: I started reading your mag not long ago and find it one of the best I have come across. It is definitely the best one in the field of stf. I think your covers are fine.

I also think FSM is good.

I liked your July ish but definitely disliked WITCH WAR. I must say that it has been a long time since I wasted my time on anything as silly. THE WOMAN FROM ALTAIR was tops and THE ULTIMATE ENGINE was second and DARK TOWER was third.

Also, couldn't THE ETHER VIBRATES be longer? Also include more science fact features, although your 'zine is, of course, primarily fictional. Trimmed edges would help and be an important improvement.

Please put all the letters in that you can as they show what the fen around the old sphere are doing.

Your companion mag FSM is good but not as interesting as SS.

Keep up the good work and include more interior illustrations. Please let Poulton and Finlay do them and dismiss Orban.—*Rte. 4, Box 204, Cordele, Ga.*

Don't jump to any hasty conclusions. You'll get to appreciate Orban after you've been around a little longer. The boy is a pro and he knows exactly what he's doing.

ONE HAPPY READER
by Rick Dunn

Dear Mr. Merwin: This is one of the letters editors say they are so fond of getting, a first. Yes, this is the first letter I've ever written an editor. And I've got one hellova lot to say.

I've been reading Science-Fiction magazines since the July 1949 issue of SS. Previously, I had read only a few books, as *When Worlds Collide,* etc. I've kept pretty quiet, just reading, always promising to write to an editor and get some things off my chest.

Today I picked up the Sept. SS, read TEV and the letters, and suddenly got the urge to write. So here, after three paragraphs of introduction, are my comments on Science-Fiction:

SF in general is my favorite pastime. Why? I like to read, and SF offers interesting and different stories. And because I take an interest in anything I do, last year I started a Science-Fiction club in my school, North Hollywood High. I met a lot of new kids, made new friends, got more enjoyment out of SF.

Now I'd like to talk about SS and TWS in particular. I can sum up my comments in a few words. I don't give a darn. I don't give a darn if Bergey paints women entirely nude. If he didn't though, I wouldn't be ashamed to turn the magazine face up. I don't give a darn if your readers want to sound off in your pages. That's your business. If they didn't though, you could print another story, or even cut those pages and pass the saving on to us in other ways. I don't give a darn if SS comes out every other month or every other year, as long as the stories are good. I don't give a darn if Joe Blow thinks one story is the best ever published. If I didn't like it, I would express my opinion at the slightest provocation (maybe without any). I'll probably interject more comments during this letter, in two years I must have found more to talk about. In conclusion of this paragraph let me say that I buy your mag only to read the stories, keep them to the standard you have set as best of the pulps, and I'll continue to buy it.

Now's a good time to list the stories I've liked best in two years of SS and TWS. First, novels: (I'm listing only those I consider really excellent) "Sea Kings of Mars," "The Portal in the Picture," *"The Other World,"* *"Let the Finder Beware,"* "The Lady is a Witch," "Wine of the Dreamers," "The City at World's End," *"The Cybernetic Brains,"* *"Shadow on the Sand,"* "The Five Gold Bands," "Overlords of Maxus," "The Starmen of Llyrdis," "The Continent Makers," *"Son of the Tree,"* "The Dark Tower," and "Alarm Reaction."

I find I've listed practically all of your novels! I never realized that I liked so many. Well, on to the novelets: "I Psi," "The Two Shadows," *"The Odessy of Yiggar Throlg,"* "Pardon My Iron Nerves" (the only Capt. F. story I ever liked), *"Tough Old Man,"* *"First Person Singular,"* "New Bodies for Old," "Signboard of Space," *"Planet of Small Men,"* "Journey for Seven," *"There Shall Be No Darkness,"* "The Voice of the Lobster," "Roman Holiday," *"The Lonely Planet,"* "Thirty *Seconds-Thirty Days,"* "The Ultimate Catalust," "The Hibited Man," "Cold War," "Communications," "The Lion of Commare," *"Amphiskos,"* "Project Spaceship," *"The Ultimate Planet,"* "The Concrete Mixer," and "On the House."

I haven't enough paper to list all the short stories I found excellent, to say nothing of those I merely enjoyed. I just want to mention "The Brink of Infinity" by Weinbaum in the March '48 issue. It was great!

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I limit my buying to seven magazines, missing I am sure, some good stories, but getting consistently good reading. Two of these feature serials. I like serials. I don't read the installments, but I read the entire story when I have it complete. Saves buying it in book form, eh?

I don't pay much attention to artists, I just look at the pictures. However, the artists I have noticed are Cartier and Rogers, both from aSF. Therefore, I say use any kind of artwork you desire, I'll be happy.

My biggest gripe in SF is at myself for buying the hard-cover novel a few days before the pocket-book comes out. 'nuff sed.—*12005 Landale, N. Hollywood, Cal.*

P.S. My list of favorite authors: L. Ron Hubbard, Fredric Brown, Murray Leinster, Henry (Lewis Padgett) Kuttner, Jack Vance, John D. MacDonald, Robert A. Heinlein, Isaac Asimov, Jack Williamson, L. Sprague DeCamp, A. E. van Vogt, and too many others to mention.

P.P.S. For a good definition of Science Fiction, see the article by Isaac Asimov in a recent *Writer's Digest.*

This is kind of a dream letter at that. Not a single squawk. Are we slipping?

FAN MAIL
by Harold Hostetler

Dear Editor: HOUSE OF MANY WORLDS was the best story I've ever seen written by one of the blue-pencil wielding men of stf. I don't mean the other editor-written epics were not good at all—some were. But this time I've really read the best one of those that I've seen so far. Have I missed better ones? I don't think so.

However, in my opinion THIS WAY TO MARS was better than the lead novel. I hate to give HOUSE OF MANY WORLDS a second-rate spot but the novelet was really a story to be admired. A nice twist to an old idea.

THE MASQUERADE ON DICANTROPUS was good—but not too good. YES, SIR! being a new idea to me (a yes robot) I thought that it was second in the short story ratings. (I don't see how you can rate a short story with a novel.) The idea seemed a little stale to me though. THE WHITE FRUIT OF BANALDAR didn't strike me as being so hot. So I'll just mention it and go on to THE LAST STORY, which was just what the name implies—the last story in the mag. But—and I emphasize the word—it was the best short story of them all! Yep, the shortest story in the whole mag was the best. It might have been the last line that did it, but it really floored me. Who would have suspected a rejection slip at that time? I didn't. How about some more short, catchy stories like that one? I really go for them.

I see that many of the fen approve of Bergey's new style. Far be it from me to tell him to revert back to the old style—but can't he do something about the colors? Does he have to paint that "dirty brown" in the background and pass it for space? Surely interstellar space doesn't look like that! Couldn't he make the whole thing (the background) like the little patch above the violet and green Earth? Oh, I know it's more time consuming, but it would be worth it.

I liked all of the interior illos except that Finlay one on pages twelve and thirteen. I wish he'd use more contrast the way he did in the first one.

I now leave you, but first, let me put in one vote for more Merwin stories. Yes, sir, a lot more.—*Box 163, Cairnbrook, Pa.*

If you had a television set you could have seen a Merwin story on LIGHTS OUT not too long ago and there will be some more—lots more—coming up, since he is now in full time production. That make you happy?

LAST REFUGE
by Jim Goldfrank

Dear Mr. Merwin: In recent months your covers on SS and TWS have been a refreshing change from what your public has come to regard as a status quo. I suppose I have made more than my share of disparaging remarks about "those Bergey covers." Giving, however, credit where it is due, I would like to say that the cover on the September SS is one of the finest I have ever seen on an S-F magazine.

The only story I've read in this issue so far is your novel. I won't call it excellent, but will say that it was well-written and very thought provoking.

It seems that SS and TWS are the last refuges, except in those magazines which print serials, of the novel in science-fiction. I feel that this form of the story in our particular field, has been neglected and I hope you will keep on printing them.—*1116 Fulton St. Woodmere, N.Y.*

You'll find a good many novels appearing first in SS in shorter version, which then hit the book markets, expanded to 60,000 or so, hard covers and two bucks and a half. Read 'em first in SS for two bits.

TIME TRACK EXPRESS
by George A. Foster

Dear Sam: Picked up S.S. on the news stand yesterday. September issue. Pleased that you found my letter amusing. Do not feel a bit humorous this trip and I'm too old to gush, with superlatives and such, over your *House of Many Worlds.*

Since I do not want to force you to the needless expense of buying bigger hats . . . permit me to say simply that I do not think you are any better as a writer than many others. PERHAPS . . . you are no better as an editor . . . I am aware of my prejudice in your favor and its causes.

No one can imagine anything nor write anything that is not first implied in his personal frame of reference. It is not logical . . . but *it is human* . . . to be positively awestruck with admiration of the other fellow's profound intelligence . . . when he reveals thought patterns similar to one's own. That is why your editorials won a keen friendly reaction from me long ago. I did not always agree with your opinions . . . in fact I often disagree

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. . . but one can't help feeling a friendly sense of companionship toward another person whose thinking so often seems to explore the same lines of speculative thought.

Your editorial in September issue dealing with what I have always known as "differentiation vectors" in human history . . . was intensely interesting to me.

I disagree with you as to the basis of error by Literary Digest, Gallup et al. You think they just asked the wrong people. I think their fundamental hypothesis failed. By that I mean that the *basic idea* of such a survey is *the assumption* that a majority of the people questioned will *answer candidly*. I think the method failed when people deliberately concealed what they thought and felt.

You think of the key factors in terms of Ben Franklin's illustration of the lost horse shoe nail and its, destruction of a kingdom. I think of the massed reality of events large and small as a "web" of Cause and Effect . . . and the point of impact of Change as a "differentiation vector". Ofter a trifling thing . . . *IF you segregate it* in your thinking . . . and consider it by itself.

Actually . . . a differentiation vector is . . . what it is . . . only because of its context . . . its position in "The Web."

Permit me to erect a different visual concept of the matter. Compare the mathematical probabilities with a vast and intricate system of railroad tracks with innumerable switches all set and locked in position.

The differentiation vector then becomes merely the foremost *atom* in the foremost *molecule* in the frog of a switch. One might not be able to identify the atom . . . but one might perceive the switch . . . even if one was totally unable to guess where it would take us . . .

Personally . . . I think a lot of people in this nation perceived . . . (a sort of tactile or "feeling" sort of perception) . . . the approach of change. Then brought the changes about *by trying to avoid them.* In short, they had a feeling the race was fixed . . . and secretly bet on the other horse instead of on the favorite . . . in the hope of winning.

Approached by a field worker in one of those surveys they *did not* reveal their true feelings or intentions. Naturally the survey added up to an erroneous conclusion. *John Q. Citizen wanted it to be in error. He felt that some one was pulling strings and he felt like a puppet . . . hated the whole pattern of events . . . and he was just going to fool them completely.*

I did not question as many people as one of those field workers . . . but I kept at it over a longer period. I broke down enough of them into confidential discussion to arrive at the above hypothesis.

Your story *House of Many Worlds* . . . if we may shift back to the concept of mathematical probabilities . . . sets up a pattern of speculation upon the possibilities of interpolation of new factors into the equations.

For me . . . it was the most fascinating background possible for your story of adventure. You used technical data . . . inventions traded between parallel worlds . . . as the factors interpolated to change the equations in each world. Neat way to erect the dramatization of the idea of interpolation since any other method would have entangled the story in a dizzy complexity of detail. I not only enjoyed that tale, Sam . . . I read it a second time . . . slowly . . . just to chew it and digest the implications.

Actually . . . even if such parallel worlds did exist . . . and all the rest of your stage props . . . *I do not think THAT method of interpolation would work.* Human history is inconsistent because human behavior is inconsistent. The twists and turns of human history are due to the strange twists and turns of human emotional *compulsions.* The cause of those compulsions is either incredibly complex . . . or exceedingly simple but as yet unidentified. Thus Homo Sapiens is still an aggregation of psychopathic bipeds among whom "The Search for Happiness" consists chiefly of the effort of one psychopath to find others with congenial tendencies.

The cause of those emotional compulsions that scramble the destiny of individuals and nations? *I wouldn't know!* Certainly I no longer credit the involved theories and mumbo jumbo of psychology. I no longer consider that psychology deals with anything more than symptoms . . . of an *unknown cause. In fact I no longer think that the concept of "subconscious mind", has any counterpart in reality.*

The process of reasoning is no more than the use of the IDEA of PATTERN as a tool or mental convenience. We take an aggregation of data and attempt to imagine a pattern into which they will all fit harmoniously. We CALL the process "Inductive Reasoning" and speak of "The Faculty of Reason" as if it were a physical attribute or perhaps an attribute of some sort of ultimate self or soul. We even speak of "Reason on Her Throne" to imply the finality of authority. It is unfortunate, for the act of belief is all too often merely a device for the mind to sit down upon . . . and the fabrications of the reasoning process all too often but a rationalization of some emotional compulsion.

Given a prefabricated pattern in which we perceive an unfilled gap . . . we study the contours of that space and perceive the implied shape of the missing piece. We call that "Deductive Reasoning" and all too often give it undue weight.

Actually, the whole performance is merely the USE of the IDEA of PATTERN as *a mental convenience by which we attempt to comprehend causitive relationships.* Its utility is strictly limited and the so-called processes of inductive and deductive reasoning have no more justification than a spasm of revelation or precognition . . . EXCEPT . . . insofar as they may suggest new experiments . . . new expeditions of the exploration and discovery into that Horizon called The Unknown.

In the last three decades I have done enough experimenting so that I no longer consider the approaches offered by psychology lead anywhere . . . unless, of course, you plan to earn fat fees as a consultant. Perhaps the answer lies in the fields of chemistry and/or physics. I wouldn't know. Perhaps it is in biology . . . for after all an outline of human history might well be entitled: Disease and Destiny.

But it was gorgeous fun . . . to get lost in the dream of your parallel worlds . . . and pretend for a little while that interpolation was easy.

My best and warmest regards to you and to all my fellow addicts of Science Fiction and its speculative thought.—*Box 300, Stoughton, Mass.*

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There's a sentence in this letter we are going to treasure: "Homo Sapiens is still an aggregation of psychopathic bipeds among whom the 'search for happiness' consists chiefly of the effort of one psychopath to find others with congenial tendencies." O Man! What of your aspirations now?

BACK TO CIVILIZATION
by Laura E. John

Dear Sam, old kid, old sock, old boy: Thanks for your wonderful novel, "House of Many Worlds." It was very intriguing. I have always considered the fourth dimension as probably being the world of "might have been" or "could have been". You treated the subject nicely, but, Brother, did you ever stick your neck out to those who still believe in racial superiority. It doesn't bother me, as I am married to a "breed," as those snobs would put it. My husband is a product of REAL AMERICAN stock, the Wyandotte Tribe and the intruders, the white man. Both he and I are very proud of his heritage, and our three children are being taught the same.

There is no true superior race here on earth, as our souls all came from the same beginning, regardless of the color of skin. Only the narrow-minded, stiff-necked hypocrites would deny that. The ending of your story was ironically superb, or should I say superbly ironic. One statement near the close gave me to pause—"it was good to see the local constable in his round-topped helmet"—and then, smash between the eyes, your surprise ending. Thanks again for giving it to us, and please do a repeat very soon. The rest of the stories were good and we were very glad to see John D. back after his long absence.

By the time this letter sees print (presumptuous, am I not?), I hope to be out of this section of the country, back to civilization, where I can buy my SF, particularly TWS and SS without traveling all over Hell's half acre to find it. Down here, a lot of the good sf magazines never appear on the newsstands any more. Why, I don't know and even the dealers can't explain it.

In your answer to Robert Marlow's inquiry on Murray Leinster, you refer him to "Looking Ahead." I "Looked Forward" and saw no mention of Leinster. What gives? And who will miss the Coles, the ones who should be raked over? Not fuel oil users, such as we.

Here's looking forward to better and better SS and TWS and hopes of a Sequel to "Wine of the Dreamers," "Starmen of Llyrdis" and "Exile of the Skies."—*Star City, Indiana.*

Let's assume we have intelligent readers and with intelligent people there isn't even any room for argument about drivel like racial superiority. There's one advantage in being an Indian, anyway—nobody can ever say "why don't you go back where you came from?"

As to your rhubarb with Merwin about "Looking Ahead" with Murray Leinster, I can only point out to you that we have one very firm rule: we are not responsible for any bundles left over 30 days. Welcome back to civilization.

SWAP AND KISSES
by David Gutierrez

Dear Sam: We are trying to start a new S-F club called THE PLANETEERS, and in order to raise dues we wish you could make the announcement that any boy or girl sending five S-F magazines or books and 75c to me, I will send five different books or mags in return.

Being that we are a new club, any suggestions from other fans or clubs would be accepted with hugs and kisses. And any boys or girls in the vicinity of Ft. Lauderdale, Florida who would like to become members, just drop us a card and we'll see what we can do.—*General Delivery, Ft. Lauderdale, Fla.*

We've got one suggestion. Better make sure those five books or mags you send don't contain any the other guy already has or you'll be sued for a lot of 75 centses. And incidentally whom have you appointed to dish out the hugs and kisses for the suggestions you crave?

MURDER INCORPORATED
by Joseph Semenovich
The Star Traveler

Dear Sam: I see that you finally got the nerve to tell the public your name. The way I figure it is that if you have the guts to tell your name I got the nerve to send you a letter. I think I have more nerve then you, Sam.

Did Bergey go mad again? What is he trying to do? Become the best cover artist in the business? If he draws another cover like the September one he will. I even think he was a bit scared to sign his name to it, but after scanning the cover with a microscope I found his name. But even without the micro I could tell that was Bergey, in fact I think any S. F. fan can tell a Bergey cover.

Those inside pics, egahd, they're Finlay allright. When you see a dame nude in an inside illo you know it gotta be Finlay. Who else draws like him?

Orban was good as usual, he always draws the same stuff. This other guy Poulton I think drew the best pic, he also drew the worst one too. That one on page 99. Uhgggggggg. Was that supposed to be a picture or was that a Bem in disguise? I think it was the latter. On the top of the pic it reads, "Robot XL-3 Wasn't Much Good, But he Served His Purpose." It shouldn't read like that, this is how it should've read. "The Pic Wasn't Much Good, but with A Story Like This it Served its Purpose."

This wasn't the worst story of the bunch but the one by MacDonald was I think one of the worst he ever wrote. You wasted such a good pic too. Third from last was (don't get frightened, Sam, it isn't yours) Vance's job. It was good but it didn't beat Gault's novelette which was fourth from the bottom. Next to best was (you guessed it Sam)

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"House of Many Worlds." This story was spoiled a bit but it had a pretty good ending. Sam, why didn't you make the guy die instead of the girl, then both of the girls would have been alone? And you have some nerve letting Juana get killed. I liked the dame, she was a nice kid and you go and kill her. You MURDERER.

The best story was the short short, "The Last Story." Sam, I bet you had something to do with that story. You being an editor, of course. Of all the things the guy could've saved he saves a rejection. Sam, if this wasn't you in disguise I don't know who it was.

This was the second story I read by Samalman, both of them were shorts. The other short was in "Wonder Story Annual." I gotta admit that Annual was something to hold on to. Maybe the cover wasn't so hot but the inside of it held some good yarns, especially the one by Williamson, "The Alien Intelligence." This story I think was one of the best I ever read. Why don't you get some of Williamson's material. I think that he's the best writer in S.F.

Well, I guess I better sign off before you get bored to death, so so-long.—*40-14 10 Street, Long Island City 1, N.Y.*

Wrong again. Samalman is not Merwin. He is his very substantial self. This is quite a game you characters play of guess the author. Don't you ever accept anything for what it seems?

AND A LITTLE ACIDOPHILUS

by J. T. Oliver

Dear Editor: This here is a genuine fan letter. I didn't read the whole issue yet but I thought I ought to comment on the stories I have read. I realize you had nothing to do with the contents of the issue, but as the new editor you will have to take the credit, or blame, as the case may be.

The cover was rather purty, but it didn't look much like a sf mag cover. What happened to Merwin? Has he suddenly discovered women? Or was he trying to attract the female people to sf? If it is the latter I can understand him. After all, a reader is another quarter, or whatever it is the company gets. But I've noticed that over the past year he has been aiming his mags at women, more and more. Most of his own stories have featured a female viewpoint character. I have nothing against women, but I'd like to have sf like it usta be—for us menfolks.

Well, Merwin's story was something of a surprise. It was written better than I thought it would be, and the plot was pretty good. The twist was good. Neat, Mr. Merwin.

Did you read THIS WAY TO MARS? Boy it was a killer! The first page was enough for me. When I got to the part that says, "After touching his toes without bending his knees twelve times . . . ." I quit. Now I honestly don't know what to think of a man who can touch his toes without bending his knees twelve times. Ye Gods. If I said a thing like that in a story the detective-writer whose protege I am would immediately try out his latest murder plot on me. And I wouldn't blame him at all. Ugh, etc.

[*Turn page*]

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THE LAST STORY was the best thing in the issue. Samalman knows how to write. And he takes a little time with it to make sure it's right, I believe. I know how the guy felt. There's nothing like a neatly printed a rejection slip to make a guy happy, or to bring back memories of the good old days. Sob.

YES, SIR! was pretty good. Nothing extra, but it wasn't bad. THE WHITE FRUIT OF BANALDAR was okay, too, but it was nothing to get excited over. A pretty fair ish, I reckon as how.

I agree with Shelby Vick about the maturity deal. I'd be willing to bet the vast majority of your readers are rather young guys. I'm 23, and I certainly don't care much for old people in a story. They are not the least bit sympathetic and often I can't understand their motives.

I reckon you understand about fandom, so this—and similar—letters will not be too much of a shock to you. But I also hope you'll understand us and not hold these things against us when we submit stories.

Good luck to you.—*315-27th St., Columbus, Ga.*

This is the first chance I've had to say thanks for your other note and the general welcome, J.T.—it was good of you to take the time and the thought. From here on I'll be getting—and dishing out—the praise and blame. As to age groups, I've never thought much about the youth or years of our readers. Chronological age doesn't have much to do with it. Some people stay young, others are born old. What is "young"? Well, receptive, I suppose, though I've sure seen a lot of kids who weren't receptive to much except the back of a hair brush. Come again.

PARTING OF THE WAYS
by Edward G. Seibel

Dear Sam: I have a bone to pick you with—one of your own, as you shall see.

I remember a while back in one of your editorials you expounded your ideal that science fiction must emphasize characters and less gadgets and BEMS and other old mainstays of science fiction—but especially gadgets was your chief preoccupation at the time. You attacked them on the basis that the present world can't understand science fiction as it existed (for you). And yet in another editorial you said the world is becoming more science-minded. Well, well, you don't say, you don't say!

Characterization didn't help your story any—what I read of it. It was an unpleasantly concocted nothing. You sure as hell will never be a Steinbeck or a Wolfe or a Mailer or a Dostoevsky. You had better return to science fiction with gadgets, etc. It would certainly produce less pain.

The plot and general layout resembled a few other odorous abortions. In short the plot has been unmercifully pounded stabbed, beaten and finally hacked to death. Seemingly you wish to give it no respite even in death. You certainly didn't aid it any with your "ideal".

You bothered with nothing except your damned characterization. It would have put me to sleep in one more page.

Summing it all up, science fiction is dead in your magazines. I shall turn my eyes to other, brighter stars. — *P. O. Box 445, Oliverhurst, Calif.*

We may be just sensitive, but we kind of get the impression that Ed has liked some other stories we've run rather better. Well, just out of curiosity, how did you like the Leinster in this ish? And the St. Clair in next month's?

IDEAS FIRST
by Eugene DeWeese

Dear Editor: . . . Which is as clever an opening gambit as I can come up with at the moment. But don't give up hope; I *am* considered something of a wit—usually of the Half-, Quarter-, or Nit- variety, of course . . .

Still there, anyone?

Why for you go under cover again? Perhaps because of your being author of the lead novel? And while speaking of such, how many mags are you editing of other than SS and TWS? Maybe Black Book Detective and Phantom Detective? Others? And more of interest to me, who are your assistant editors?

Having three issues of SS and one TWS at hand, and somewhat mixed reactions to some of your statements therein, Here Goeth:

First, for the favorable-type reaction: Sez you, ". . . we felt it was a relief to have humanity take it on the chin for a change."

I think that's one of the reasons I like to read stf. It's the only kind of fiction I've been able to locate in which there is actually any doubt as to how everything is going to come out. In the ordinary adventure, detective, western, mystery, love, etc. tales, one can take for granted, at the very first, that the hero will win out against all sorts of impossible odds, or whatever he is up against.

But in science-fiction, there is actually a possibility that everything will *not* work out all hotsy-totsy for said hero. For which, Hooray!

Now for the unfavorable-type reaction, a bit more decided than the favorable:

I don't agree entirely with the Coles, that you should turn stf into a scientific textbook with a few characters and plots thrown in at random. However, I don't agree even more with you, that it should be merely ". . . fiction with a dab of pseudo-science . . ." and that such "dabs" should depend upon the demands of the story as fiction.

If that were the case, could it even be called "science-fiction"? It would be just plain Love, Adventure, Action, etc., fiction with whatever science there is thrown in just for the heck of it, entirely unnecessary. An author could take any old story, place the action on another planet, maybe another time or dimension, and call it science-fiction—which I consider a pretty lousy thing to do. Or, the said author could take a science-fiction story, move it back to present-day Earth, and sell it to a non-stf magazine.

It's always been my belief that the "idea" in a science-fiction story should always come first

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and whatever the plot, characters, conflict, etc. should come as a *result* of this basic idea. They should come about as Murray Leinster says he writes most of his s-f. He pokes an idea around, sees what happens, then maybe writes a story *around the idea*. Such as he mentions in the introduction to SIDEWISE IN TIME, while commenting on how he came to write THE FOURTH DIMENSIONAL DEMONSTRATOR and DE PROFUNDIS.

The entire story should be, I think, to qualify as science-fiction, impossible without the science (pseudo or otherwise) or whatever device or idea the author employs.

If anything is added as an incidental, let it be the conflicts between the characters in the story. Let such conflicts be secondary to the "idea" or motivation behind it. If I wanted stories in which such usually cornball conflicts, I wouldn't be reading science-fiction. There are hundreds of other mags dealing with such stereotyped material.

Covers: You go from one extreme to the other. For a long time, always the scantily clad femme; and now, spaceships by the dozen, all seeming to look amazingly similar. It is an improvement, I admit, but I advise Bergey to take a look at the work of other stf painters.

Still, your covers are probably the best in the general pulp field. I suppose I should be satisfied.

One comment on stories: How came the Samalman thing wasn't in some fanzine? It looks typical of the short-shorts they publish, and hardly enuf for a pro. The last line brought out that opinion. Had that been left off, I might have compared it to Bradbury, but as is, with that, I suppose, "climax" . . . Nuthin'.

Your novels are of late becoming increasingly hard to get started on. I still haven't, and doubt that I ever will, force myself into THE DARK TOWER.

George A. Foster should write letters for a living. Best I've seen in any mag for quite a time now. Best I've ever seen in yours. — *Rochester, Indiana.*

The essential point here, we think, is that stf doesn't need to be conventional. There are limits to this, however. Certain minimums as to plot and conflict must be observed, or you are going to find the story doesn't move. You may scorn all this "cornball" plumbing but without it you get pretty much a lecture instead of a story and for a lecture you can go to any textbook.

You may not spot a lot of things that an author builds into a story but you can be sure that if the story is absorbing and you can't wait to find out what happens next and you hate to see it end—a lot of conventional plotting gimmicks have gone into it. They shouldn't be obvious, of course, and maybe it is the obviousness of bad writing which annoys you most of the time.

Well, it's been nice seeing you—drop in again. Next round will be one month from now instead of double that. *The Editor*

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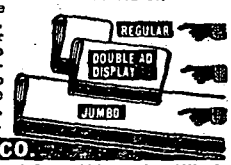

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REVIEW OF THE CURRENT SCIENCE FICTION FAN PUBLICATIONS

THE really well-done fanzine, cooked with guts, is a joy to behold. The medium-rare fanzine is actually not rare at all, but most numerous—reliable though not outstanding, it constitutes the bulk of the field. Now let's talk about the not-very-good-at-all 'zines—those of rock-bottom B-list caliber, back when there was a B-list.

Up to a couple of months ago, when the job of vivisecting fanzines for STARTLING STORIES and THRILLING WONDER STORIES settled into our lap, we hardly knew a fanzine from a hole in somebody's head; quite despite the fact that we had been writing and

editing stf for some four years, and reading it for eighteen, the body of organized fandom and its energetic journals remained deep, dark mysteries to us. Now, suddenly, we've had to come to a puzzled halt and form an approach to the whole business . . . so we've hit upon a happy solution, which we shall proceed to describe.

Fanzines, like love affairs, are things unto themselves. Pursuing the analogy, we have resolved not to stand aghast at even the out-and-out horrors, of which there are lamentably a few, because of one important factor not included on the masthead of any fanzine we've ever seen: the age (i. e., a rough index to the degree of mature action we may expect) of the editor. If you're going to try to judge a fanzine by any respectable literary or artistic standards, this missing factor excludes from your head-scratchings the best basis for determining

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whether it was launched by grade-schoolers, with a good and understandable chance of ending up under par, or is under par simply because of an older editor's ineptness which we might justly roast as reviewer.

We're talking about skunkzines, understand; we certainly are *not* implying that *all* fanzines give rise to the above mentioned critic's dilemma. Far from it. There is a healthy percentage of slicked-up jobs, witty and erudite in content, usually superiorly illustrated and printed; there is the great majority of reasonably capable, reasonably enjoyable fanzines; there are the adzines and news-zines, whose lack of pretension to essentially literary and artistic merit puts them outside this discussion.

But indisputably others are twitching, shambling creatures of the night, bearing upon misshapen shoulders stories and articles and artwork that display the idiot grin and assembled worth of last year's Hallowe'en pumpkin. And while it cannot be maintained that the glittery jobs are exclusively the product of the older fans, and the bloopers of the younger—there are notable examples definitely otherwise—still we will give odds that it shapes up that way in general.

So . . . darned if we're going to rear up on our hind legs and slam the crudzines. Even if they are loaded with material so trite, naive or just plain bad as to make your flesh crawl. For some young 'un may just have found out what stf and fandom are all about and be burning to spread the Word, and far, far be it from us to discourage him in any way. He'll do it better, later on. Meantime, we like 'em all—which is the happy solution we spoke of.

Each and every fanzine proves one thing, if only one, about its editor: that he has the energy, and the time (or makes it), and the money (or gets it by hook or crook), and the love of science-fiction and the concern with science, and the better future, to sit down and sweat battleships to turn it out month after month. More power to him—even if his 'zine at present occupies the bottom of our list.

Little Monsters

Before turning to the fanzines at hand, here is an item of curious interest which we pass hastily on: the Little Monsters of America are trying to form a local chapter in the New York City area. As of now, there are eight Little Monsters, including the Master Monster, and they want to recruit more monsters in order to put out more fanzines. Anything interested will

[*Turn page*]

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All eldritch luck to the Little Monsters.

FANTASY ADVERTISER, 1745 Kenneth Road, Glendale 1, California. Editor, Ronald Squire. Published bi-monthly. 15c per copy, 75c per annum.

A fine collage cover (photograph combined with other art techniques) moves us to struggle upright and bow thrice in deepest admiration to artist Morris Scott Dollens. Beautiful stuff. This issue includes an analysis of story-form changes during the last decade of aSFiction; an article on stf art by Dollens, illustrated by himself; some book reviews, and numerous advertised bargains in stf books, magazines, etc. Very nifty print job. If you're any kind of collector, this one is a must. The good editorial content is gravy.

FANTASY-TIMES, 137-03 32nd Avenue, Flushing 54, New York. Editor, James V. Taurasi. Published every other week. 10c per copy.

Little of importance can be said about a news-zine, it would appear, other than that it is doing a poor, a good or a superior job of reporting. FT, as usual, does an exemplary one, getting there firstest with the mostest. And very near the neatest . . . certain other mimeographed 'zines might benefit by studying FT's clean format and striving to sincerely flatter.

STEF HEADLINES, Box 6, Helena, Montana. Editor, Walter A. Coslet. Published fortnightly. Twenty issues for 50c, forty-five for a buck.

A postcard-zine, offering boiled-down reports of fan and pro doings. The address-side of the one we received bears a typewritten note of agony, which we quote: "Now that it's printed, is it good enough for the A-list?" M-m-m-m . . . probably not, Cosy, even if there still were an A-list—that postcard just isn't hefty enough. But the news items, mostly of pro-authors' sales and forthcoming stf books, mags and reprints, seem of adequate interest, and it's a neatly gotten up little job. Friends?

COSMAG/SCIENCE-FICTION DIGEST, 57 East Park Lane, Atlanta, Georgia. Co-editors, Ian Macauley, Henry W. Burwell, Jr. Published bi-monthly. 25c per copy, $1.25 per annum.

A merger of Macauley's Cosmag and Burwell's SFD, presented in neat new off-set wrapping. The Cosmag section contains a readable if creaky-themed story by J. T. Oliver and assorted short articles, one of which—PROFOUND UTTERANCES, a collection of excerpts from letters by fans and now-professionals culled from old fan-and-prozines—we found especially enjoyable. Perhaps because none of our forgotten gurgles was dug up and included. The SFD portion continues to reprint items of above average merit from other 'zines—a good idea, as we've said once before.

SOL, 914 Hammond Road, Ridgewood, New Jersey. Editor, David Ish. Published "as often as humanly possible," at 10c a shot.

A first issue, displaying the colorful syndrome of same: unhappy mimeographing, haphazard contents, howling typographical errors from cover to cover. Nevertheless, a certain gleam in its third eye promises its intention of bettering itself. The fiction we thought a little flimsy, with the exception of editor Ish's recounting of his futile attempt to convert to stf a young thing whom he lured up to his den allegedly for that purpose—a good fantasy plot, wethinks, combining the patently improbable with the everyday. Articles are more muscular; Rog Phillips, also muscular, is present with a tongue-in-cheek account of his beginning as a writer. Should improve with age—the 'zine, we mean. Rog's doing fine.

SCIENCE-FICTION NEWSSCOPE, 43 Tremont Street, Malden 48, Mass. Editor Lawrence Ray Campbell. Published monthly. 5c per copy, 50c per annum.

Still giving with the news, fan and pro. Still suffering from arthritic mimeographing. Still well worth the price.

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UTOPIAN; no address, editor, frequency of publication or price that we could locate. Where'd you hide the masthead, fellers?

A big one—almost sixty pages, passably mimeoed. Contains good articles, fair stories and departments, visible poems and art, and readers' letters. Most enjoyable, we thought, was R. J. Banks, Jr.'s epic poem (with a sneaky glance in the direction of HIAWATHA) entitled MIGHTY MERWIN'S FASTING; and we are happy to report that Mighty Merwin, Jr., got a boot out of it too. In the review section PRO-MAG PARADE there is some confusion concerning authors' bylines that cries for clearing up instanter: 1) Richard Wilson is Richard Wilson; 2) Bob Lowndes is Bob Lowndes; 3) H. B. Fyfe is H. B. Fyfe; 4) H. Beam Piper is H. Beam Piper. None of them, we assure the Utopian, is any of the others. Also, Murphy is no newcomer; he's been in and out of the field for years. Also, skipping back a few pages to Leif Ayen's run-down on non-Aryan detective heroes in THE VULTURE'S NEST, we must sulk a little at the omission from those named of Detective Inspector Napoleon Bonaparte, whom we would rate somewhere upstairs in that category.

PHANTASMAGORIA, 41 Compton Street, Dudley Hill, Bradford, Yorkshire, England. Editors, Derek and Mavis Pickles. Published irregularly. No price listed.

As a pained aside to the culprit who typed the stencils for this issue, may we point out that there is excellent reason for the customary separation, by a space, of the close of one sentence from the beginning of the next? Otherwise,as you can readily see,it is unsettling,what? And the same applies after commas,what? Maybe it's all an attempt to save paper, or increase content, by ramming in more words per page; but no benefit derived can compare to the difficulty in reading. Otherwise, Phanta is a good job—this issue contained two pleasant-enough yarns by Clive Jackson and Peter J. Ridley, various reports on the recent stf convention in England, letters and some poems.

WILD HAIR, 7628 South Pioneer Boulevard, Whittier, California. Editors, Charles Burbee, F. Towner Laney, William Rotsler; guest editor, John van Couvering. Published every fourteen months. No price listed.

A rather personal little item, whose editors are its sole contributors. Eight pages of chatter including: a profile, as it were, of Claude Degler; a short article on the possible and unhappy impact of postal censoring on fanzines; some purplish anecdotes and gags which we found to our purplish liking, and a wonderful front cover of solid typescript entitled "the babble that is fandom" which, we gather, is yakkity-yattity excerpted from a tape the editors had going during a bull-session. We hope they don't mind if we give with a few samples:

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Wild Hair's artwork, well spotted and pleasantly sardonic, features a scowling, bullet-shaped little what-in-

[*Turn page*]

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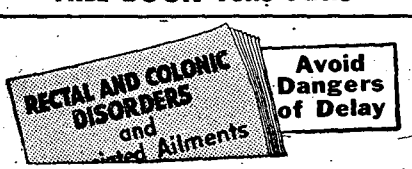

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hell-is-it that we'd like to walk on a leash, if we thought we could trust it there. All in all, Wild Hair deserves a more frequent showing.

Poetry, No Less

Putting Wild Hair to one side, we find thus uncovered a small stack of 'zines adding up to some forty pages of poetry, mostly fan-variety. These, in some fairness, we will tackle *en masse*.

Ninety per cent of the fan poetry which we do not manage to avoid leans strongly toward fantasy; moreover, toward howling bare-faced imitation of Ashton Smith, Lovecraft, Wandrei and others of that general school. Now, we lay claim to as much enjoyment of fantasy poetry as the next guy when it creeps from the three-lobed burning pens of writers of the above caliber . . . but their work is unfortunately quite easy to ape, so far as surface styling and approach to the uncanny go, and the result simply bores us stiff.

True, there are occasional gems, as well as a number of people putting out poetry-zines who know definitely what they are about. Lorraine and Coblentz, for example, are doing a fine job. So put it this way: some pretty good poets contribute to 'zines; some garden-variety fans can knock off a good poem too; but an awful lot of fans just sit down and write pomes. Must be catching or something!

FANVARIETY, 420 South 11th Street, Poplar Bluff, Missouri. Editor, W. Max Keasler. Published monthly. 10c per copy, $1.00 per dozen.

A rather light-hearted specimen, featuring articles by Ken Kruger, who has a temper; John Davis, who has a sense of humor; Richard Elsberry, who has seen THE THING and nods a little glumly. Also a page of photographs of fans including Bill Rotsler of the masthead of Wild Hair, two very pretty gurrils, and Ray Nelson, whose numerous and humorous doodles in this issue we found most enjoyable of the artwork. Also a story made up almost entirely of unspeakable puns, at which we groaned when we weren't staring back at Nelson's little saucer-eyed monsters.

Well-l-l . . . we started with Little Monsters, so let's end with little monsters. Still a good lot of 'zines on hand; they'll get the treatment in THRILLING WONDER STORIES next month. See you then.

—JEROME BIXBY.

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SCIENCE FICTION MOVIE REVIEW

THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL

Produced by:	Julian Blaustein
Directed by:	Robert Wise
Screen Play:	Edmund H. North
From the Story by:	Harry Bates
Music by:	Bernard Herrman
Released by:	20th Century-Fox

THIS is by all means the best science fiction film we have so far seen. It achieves a feeling of reality, of "it might have happened," and it does this by telling its story in terms which the average person can understand.

If you are unfamiliar with the Bates story, the plot is simple enough, though minor changes occur in the picture-version. A space ship from an unnamed planet comes to Earth, landing in Washington. It carries a human pilot and a robot. The human's name is Klaatu and he has come to Earth to deliver a warning. Alien races know that man has tapped atomic energy and is about to step off his planet into space.

Outside, war has been abolished. But the Aliens, observing us, know that mankind is basically warlike. The message is simple. Fight on Earth all you like—but try to bring wars and aggression to other planets, and Earth will be reduced to a cinder.

Klaatu feels his message is important enough to warrant a meeting of all the heads of government. But the heads of government can't see it quite that way. For his pains, Klaatu is shot, imprisoned, chased and finally killed. At his death the robot goes into action and, with power enough to destroy the Earth, threatens to do so but is restrained by instructions left by Klaatu. Revived, at least temporarily, from death, Klaatu delivers his message to the scientists and departs.

The boys in Hollywood obviously had a good time with this film. The satire is laid on with a will, sparing no one. The stupidities of bureaucrats and man-in-the-street alike are dished up with devastating effect. In fact you will squirm a little and wonder whether human-

[*Turn page*]

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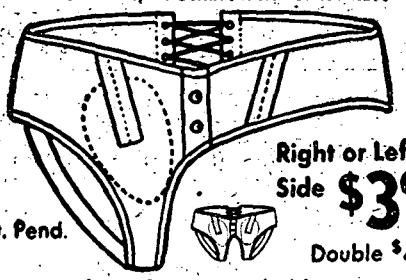

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ity can really be so stupid and unheeding and blind.

In all the city of Washington, Klaatu could get no one to listen to him but one woman and a great scientist (Einstein in disguise, played by Sam Jaffe).

The shots of the army going into action are done with a superb and wicked satire that is a joy to watch. In fact, I am no little amused that the Army permitted it. Could it be that they never tumbled to the fact they were being flayed alive? The incredible efficiency with which they go after Klaatu—a hunted fugitive fleeing down dark streets—tanks and jeeps and machine guns, radio and road blocks—the amazing efficiency and all so bull-headedly wrong!

There is some corn in the movie, of course. And we grieve to report that it is in the strictly stf scenes. The props were effective enough—but so palpably faked!

The flying saucer space-ship, though beautifully handled in motion, looked like a Christmas tree ornament. The robot who is supposed to be made of solid metal, harder than anything known on Earth, bends visibly at elbows and knees. And when his visor lifts and beams shoot out, which melt down tanks and guns and motorized equipment, to the accompaniment of blinding light—it does seem a little, just a little, corny.

It is in the human relationships that the picture excels, in the handling of crowds, of emotions and passions and panics released and set in motion by the visitor from space.

Michael Rennie as Klaatu is superb and it is his picture from beginning to end. He has starred in British films for ten years, and was chosen for this part precisely because his face and voice are unfamiliar to American audiences. Thus the illusion of his being a man from outer space is better maintained than if a well-known American actor played the part.

Photography and direction are first rate. The musical score by Bernard Herrman is impressive, and gives the story much of its lifting excitement and suspense.

In all, this is quite a milestone in stf movies. The choice of story was a good one and the production itself a singularly happy one. Such little touches as having Gabriel Heatter, H. V. Kaltenborn, Elmer Davis and Drew Pearson appear as themselves, broadcasting commentary on the events, added verisimilitude. And the fact that these commentators allowed themselves to be kidded is a credit to them.

Let's have more like this!

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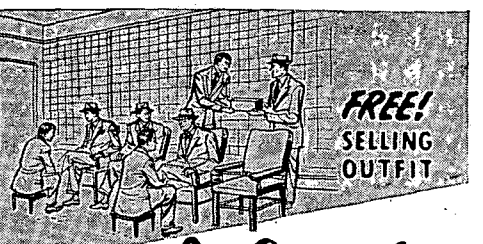

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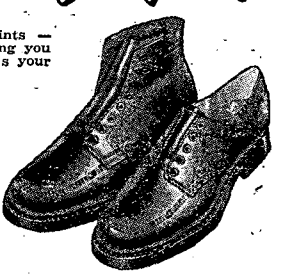
Sell amazing Velvet-eez air cushion innersole shoes with steel box toes — horsehide shoes, elk-tanned leather shoes, kid shoes, kangaroo leather shoes, slip-resistant Gro-Cork soles, oil-resistant Neoprene soles — every good type of dress, service, and sport footwear—at money-saving direct-from-factory prices. Exclusive comfort features that cannot be found in retail stores.

Also special steel shanks and sturdy built-in comfort arches. Be the Mason Shoe Counselor in your area and make lots of EXTRA cash every week! You're way ahead of competition — you draw on our factory stock of over 150,000 pairs plus huge daily factory production—each customer gets EXACT fit in the style he or she wants. Special features make it extra easy to sell gas station men, factory workers, waiters, etc.



Take Orders Direct From Factory

You sell features that no other shoe man or store can offer the folks in your territory. The Velvet-eez demonstrator you'll get free in your professional Sales Outfit will make easy sales for you, even in your spare time, as it has for hundreds of other Mason Shoe Men.

Velvet-eez

Guaranteed by Good Housekeeping — Replacement or Refund of Money if Not as Advertised Therein

The Good Housekeeping Magazine Guarantee Seal on Velvet-eez shoes opens doors for you and clinches sales.

HUGE NATIONAL ADVERTISING PROGRAM

YOU are played up in big, powerful ads in National magazines. People are eager to get your special Personal Fitting Service. Rush the coupon QUICK.

MASON SHOE MFG. CO.
Dept. M-869, Chippewa Falls, Wis.

DON'T DELAY

RUSH THE COUPON NOW!

Mason Shoe Mfg. Co.
Dept. M-869, Chippewa Falls, Wisc.
Set me up right away for BIG PROFITS! Rush me your FREE Starting Selling Outfit featuring Air Cushion shoes, leather jackets, other fast sellers. Send everything free and postpaid.

Name .....
Address .....
Town ..... State .....

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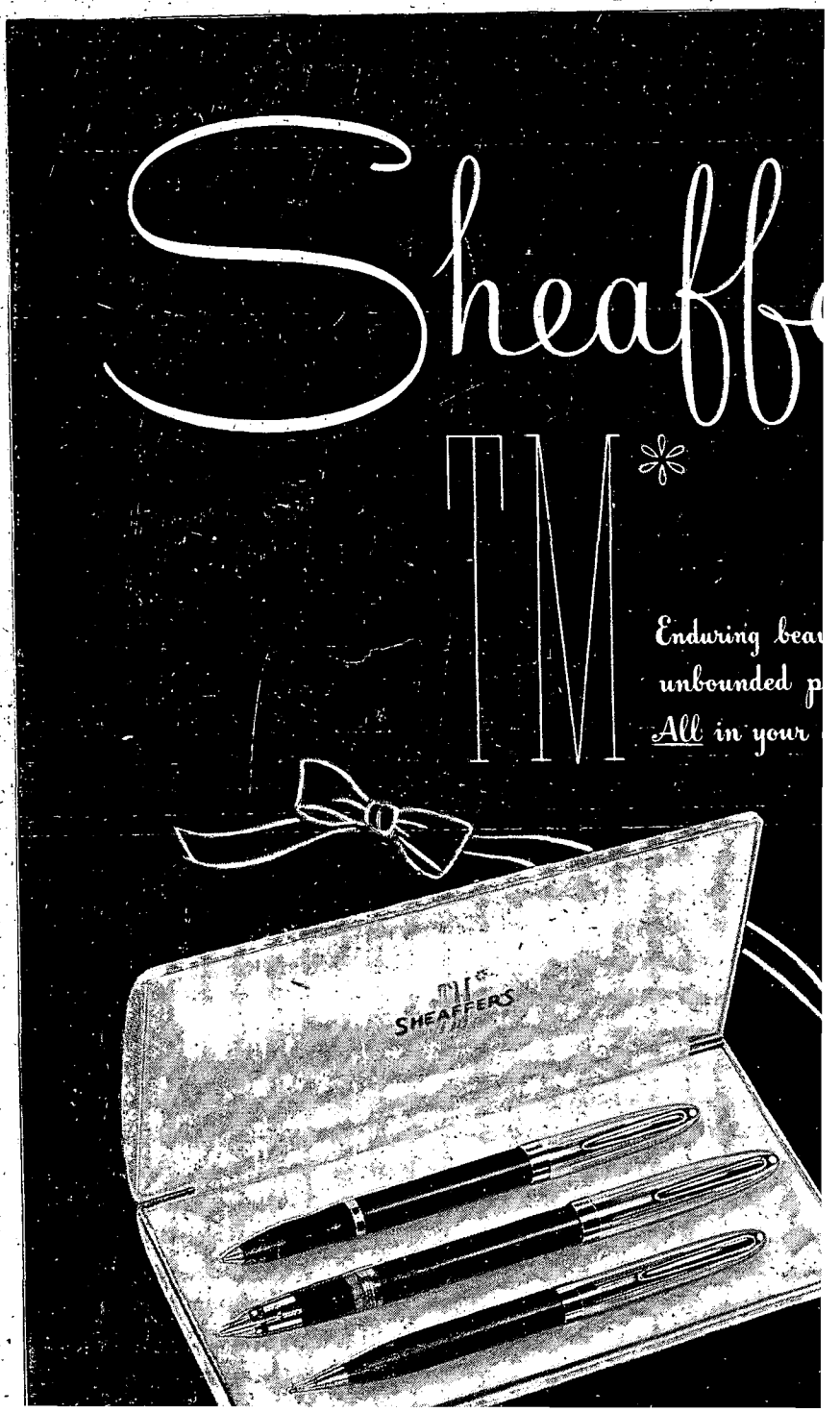

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